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**Representation and Revision: Cary, Shakespeare, and Renaissance Ideologies of
Marriage**

by

Rachel Fitz Prusko



A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

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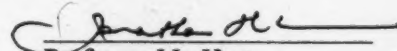
ABSTRACT

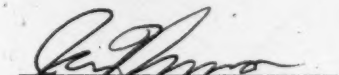
Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* and Elizabeth Cary's *The Tragedy of Mariam* similarly depict women's experience in early modern marriage, but with different implications. Portia and Mariam both contend with patriarchal marriage, within which they must exist as subordinate beings. The plays were written when the humanist ideology of companionate marriage was ingrained in English social practice; this 'new' ideology stressed love and mutuality between husband and wife, thereby putatively enhancing the wife's position. In fact, the opposite was true: a woman in love, proponents of the theory emphasized, would voluntarily erase herself and take pleasure in obedience; husbands thus continued to amass power. While neither Mariam nor Portia will comply with this ideology, Mariam's subversive response is ultimately contained. Shakespeare, however, gives Portia free reign to revise her position within patriarchal marriage. In this she is unique among Shakespeare's women, as among actual women of her day. *Mariam*, written by a married Englishwoman, will validate this analysis of Portia.

University of Alberta

Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled Representation and Revision: Cary, Shakespeare, and Renaissance Ideologies of Marriage submitted by Rachel Fitz Prusko in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.


Professor J.L. Hart


Professor I. Munro


Professor E.D. Blodgett

18 July 2000
Date

For my mother, Linda Woodbridge

*And wheresoe'er we went, like Juno's swans,
Still we went coupled and inseparable.*

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my supervisor, Professor Jonathan Hart, for his tireless enthusiasm, warm encouragement, and keen insight.

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my mother, Professor Linda Woodbridge, an excellent teacher and a very dear friend.

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Introduction



In recent years, feminist Renaissance scholars, in an effort to elucidate women's lived experience in the period, have turned their attention to women writers. Such scholars have brought to light the work of many previously unknown or little known female authors,¹ whose writings now play an invaluable role in fostering a modern understanding of Renaissance woman's struggles and triumphs, and which often reach beyond their status as cultural documents to become interesting reading in themselves. Unhappily, though, these fascinating studies are frequently employed with little reference to the Shakespearean canon,² presumably with the idea that to study his work and that of other famous Renaissance men is merely to pander to the values of the 'establishment.' Among contemporary feminist academics, examinations of gender issues within the work of men (particularly white, heterosexual men) are rapidly becoming passé. Certainly we should, as Elaine Hobby stresses, "[return] to the past and its writings with new questions" (*Virtue of Necessity* 24). Yet as we proceed in these fresh inquiries, it would indeed be a great loss to allow the Shakespearean drama to fall by the wayside; as eager students continue to demonstrate an interest in Shakespeare, there seems to me a growing need to reconcile this author with the feminist project.³ The study of his female contemporaries is extremely useful in this respect, since it augments our contextual

framework, providing a glimpse into Renaissance life as these women lived it. In my own study, I wish to investigate the treatment of culturally prominent women's issues, particularly marriage, in *The Merchant of Venice*, and to use Elizabeth Cary's *The Tragedy of Mariam* to illuminate these issues from a female perspective.

In incorporating Shakespeare and Cary into the same study, I do not purpose to liken each to the other. Indeed, such a comparison is simply not to be made, for, as Megan Matchinske notes in "Credible Consorts," the writings of these two authors "are multiply nuanced by a host of disparate and not-always-parallel interests and agendas. Reading play against play, character against character, author against author only goes so far" (439). In addition to contextual discrepancies, though, readers also face a vast aesthetic distance between *Merchant* and *Mariam*, one they cannot reasonably be expected to bridge. Matchinske, seeking a viable feminist approach to teaching Shakespeare alongside his female contemporaries, proposes a method which she terms a "cultural thematics," meaning that courses would focus on "salient issues rather than authors, shared concepts rather than selected plays. . . . A cultural-thematics approach short-circuits many of the uninterrogated aesthetic judgments that students are likely to make when grappling with Shakespeare texts alongside other writings" (441). This approach (which smacks of high school English curricula) seems heavily reductive. Why should scholars and students cease to address questions of literary merit, of style and language? And what is feminist about releasing women writers from the rigors of textual scrutiny?

In my view, Cary's *Mariam* is unable to sustain such scrutiny when read alongside Shakespeare; I will not pretend (as some do) that the play achieves a similar

standard of literary greatness. However, it is still an important work in its own right, and merits a closer study than Matchinske's proposed "cultural thematics" would allow. If we cannot read Renaissance women's writing according to the same criteria by which we judge that of their male counterparts, we must nevertheless discover its worth through close examinations of individual texts. The first original play written by a woman in English, *Mariam* provides an exciting, largely unmediated glimpse into the world of the Renaissance wife, and as such supports an independent reading, just as Shakespeare's *Merchant* does. When read in conjunction with *Merchant*, however, Cary's drama also functions to elucidate meaning: Mariam's wifely conduct sheds light on Portia's very different behavior within the same role. Written by a married Englishwoman, and dealing amply with marital issues, *Mariam* serves to substantiate an analysis of the married woman in Shakespeare. My own feminist approach to *Mariam* is therefore based on an investigation of meaning rather than literary merit or general theme. Cary equips readers with an invaluable insight into women's lived experience; given its female perspective, an examination of her drama should preface a feminist consideration of Shakespeare's *Merchant*.

While the two are not comparable texts, then, they are certainly complementary ones. Stephanie Wright, in her excellent article "The Canonization of Elizabeth Cary," suggests that modern attempts to resurrect Cary as an important Renaissance author have tended, counterproductively, to separate her from mainstream authors by bestowing on her an "exceptional status" (56). *Mariam* thus becomes significant only by virtue of its author and not as a text itself. Wright argues that the text is thereby "denied vital

interplay with other texts of the period" (60); it becomes closed off, "immune, but also harmless" (63). She writes:

The invalidity of sealing off the text in such a way is irrevocably exposed by the fact that it relates, on a purely textual level, to many other works. For example, the play is part of the European tradition of dramas concerning Herod and Mariam, upon whom two other English Renaissance plays were based and there is a clearly discernible similarity between *The Tragedy of Mariam* and Shakespeare's *Othello*. Two recent articles suggest that *The Tragedy of Mariam* may have been a source for Middleton and Rowley's *A Fair Quarrel* and for the anonymous *Second Maiden's Tragedy*, and the hyperbolic misogynistic discourse which is deconstructed so effectively by the pamphlets of Esther Sowernam, Rachel Speght and Constantia Munda is given similar treatment in *The Tragedy of Mariam*. (60)

To align Shakespeare and Cary therefore proves a consequential as well as an interesting venture. Rather than diminishing Cary, it seems to me that pairing her work with that of her famous male contemporary in fact strengthens her authorial position. The association serves both to illuminate meaning in *The Merchant of Venice* and to validate *Mariam* as a major Renaissance work.

In critical discussions of *The Tragedy of Mariam*, feminist scholars often extol Cary's audacity in attempting to question the patriarchal underpinnings of Renaissance marriage. Elaine Beilin's early essay, "Elizabeth Cary and *The Tragedie of Mariam*," points to the "delicate balance" operating in Cary's created dialectic between husband and wife, suggesting that while Cary does not resolve the power struggle between the two, neither does she "allow the conventional prohusband response to dominate in either poetic form or content" (56). Some critics view Cary's play as a response to or even a critique of the prevailing social construction of women as inferior beings. Laurie J. Shannon notes that "the formal attributes of the closet drama are well-suited to extended philosophical analysis or ruminations . . . closet drama makes use of long monologues

and sparsely populated scenes to elaborate intellectual or philosophical issues" (*The Tragedie of Mariam: Cary's Critique of the Terms of Founding Social Discourses* 145). In observing Cary's exploration of patriarchal commonplaces, such critics often conclude that the author is leaning toward an outright interrogation of female subjection within marriage.⁴

Cary's play indeed examines the role and status of the Renaissance wife, often crystallizing the difficulties inherent to this position through her depiction of women who struggle with the wifely ideal prescribed for them. Her female villain, Salome, actually proposes that women be permitted to divorce their husbands, while her female hero, Mariam, normally the very picture of obedience, ultimately refuses to comply with her husband's commands. Such struggles evoke the lived experience of wives in Cary's time. As my first chapter will demonstrate, the humanist (and later Protestant) ideology of companionate marriage, prevalent when Cary wrote *Mariam*, stressed love and mutuality in marital relations; it was a model which opposed dynastic or mercenary marriage. This 'new' ideology ostensibly resulted in greater marital equality and thus marked an improvement in the lot of wives. However, companionate marriage in fact remained firmly tied to patriarchal ideology; if anything, husbands possessed more power than they did previously, since 'love' required that wives erase themselves entirely and learn to mirror their spouses. At the same time, however, Protestant thought emphasized the significance of the individual conscience, a notion which awoke in women a powerful sense of self. The result of such conflicted ideology was the deep-seated ambiguity that echoes throughout *Mariam*.

Tempting though it is to join other like-minded readers and emerge from this "ambiguous reality" (Travitsky 184) with a sense of Cary's 'feminist' tendencies fully intact, I find rather that the play does little to ameliorate the situation of the Renaissance wife. *Mariam*, with its emphasis on love and the wifely duty encompassed by that term, is truly representative of companionate marriage ideology, and as such ultimately constrains wives to their subordinate position. To define it as representational, however, is not to ignore its figuration of the rebellious female voice. Given that marriage doctrine in the Renaissance period was fraught with discrepancy and contradiction in its instruction for wives, it seems natural enough that Cary's play would articulate such conflict. The drama is thus a compelling examination of both wives' rebellion and their compliance, with a final privileging of wifely acquiescence.

This notion of love-marriage, so clearly depicted in Cary's *Mariam*, also features prominently in *The Merchant of Venice*. To characterize Portia as loving, generous, and merciful is an easy and natural step for readers to take. When Portia frets about her lack of choice in a marriage partner, Nerissa assures her that thanks to her father's ploy—the three chests—Portia "will no doubt never be chosen by any rightly but one who you shall rightly love" (*Merchant* 1.2.30-31). Accordingly, Portia registers disgust at each man Nerissa names, saying of two suitors that she "had rather be married to a death's head with a bone in his mouth than to either of these" (1.2.47-48). When, however, Nerissa speaks of Bassanio, whom she feels is "the best deserving a fair lady" of any man she has seen, Portia concedes that he is indeed "worthy of thy praise" (109-12). Portia's desire to select her marriage partner herself, coupled with the fact that she indeed marries the man

she desires, initially allows us to construct her as simply a woman in love and her marriage as a love-marriage.

Yet this construction is a limited one, and one which the rest of the play does not wholly support. We learn almost immediately that Bassanio's desire for Portia might be described more accurately as a desire for money and status. Portia, like Mariam and like all Renaissance wives, functions as a commodity in an economically-oriented male world; as such she is a mere piece of property which may be bought, sold, and even stolen. This unsettling conflation of people and property, love and money, occurs in both plays, and will be considered in some detail. Generally speaking, men's failure to extricate women from economic concerns results in the loss of female self: upon marriage women would relinquish voice, identity, and, notably, property to their husbands. When a woman surrendered herself in this way—through her acceptance of male ownership—she was thought to be exhibiting 'love' for her husband. Thus the so-called love-marriage, or companionate marriage, never truly abandoned issues of money and property; it simply reconfigured them under the guise of mutuality.

In examining the structure of the male-female relationship, we must also look closely at the male characters and the relationships among them. Friendship, or indeed love, among males is a salient aspect of both dramas; such relationships are important to my study because they tend to accentuate female subordination in marriage. The male 'homosocial' bond, as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has applied the term in *Between Men*, worked to perpetuate existing social structures through the ownership and exchange of women; male alliances occluded women's participation in society as anything other than objects of exchange between men, a practice which gave rise to the conflation of women

and money that I have already mentioned. But men, as I hope to show in my reading of *Merchant*, did not fail solely to differentiate between *women* and money. Social historian Alan Bray has shown that in their friendships with one another, men considered economics abhorrent; money was not to play a role in such relationships ("Homosexuality and the Signs of Male Friendship in Elizabethan England" 51). Yet Bray indicates that despite this dictate, issues of money and property were nearly always implicated in male friendships, a truth exhibited in the Bassanio-Antonio relationship. Money was evidently of particular importance to men in early modern society.

But if *Merchant's* Bassanio will not forgo his desire for power and money, neither will his bride. However willing critics may be to paint her as a loving wife, Portia does not act the part of a woman in love. Though she properly declares her intention to relinquish self, money, and power to her new husband, she in fact retains firm control over all three. Marriage does not erase this woman: she continues to manage her own finances and command her own servants. She even dresses as a man and, fearlessly intruding on the male public sphere, adopts the authoritative role of judge. The play thus seems to proffer a flexible vision of marriage: Portia's character may comprise love and mercy, but we would do her a great disservice to consider these features alone. Rather, we must also look to Portia's powerful sense of self, her ability to step outside the traditional limitations imposed on married women of her day. Shakespeare's female hero reclaims herself in a manner closed to Cary's Mariam.

Of course, Portia owes much of her autonomy to the fact that she exists in the world of comedy, which Mariam does not. Shakespeare's comic structure inverts cultural norms, opening a space for female voice and activity. Northrop Frye, in his discussion of

the carnival period in Shakespearean comedy, defines this stage as a "phase of temporarily lost identity" (*A Natural Perspective* 76). Typically, this loss entails sexual inversion, such as we find in the disguises of Portia, Nerissa, and Jessica. Identity, whether singular or social, is ultimately rediscovered in the period of festivity; the most common form of identity is of the social type: that attained in marriage. The heroine dons her ordinary, female garments and becomes a wife, and the sexual license and confusion which characterize the carnival period are contained. I find that *Merchant*, however, does not entirely conform to this pattern, since Portia's adoption of a conventional married identity is rather less than sincere. Portia returns to social normalcy equipped with her experience as a male judge—experience which she does not simply discount upon marriage. Jonathan Hart, in "The Ends of Renaissance Comedy," argues that "the ends of comedy represent a return to order, but a restoration with loose ends" (91). Portia's halfhearted wifely submission constitutes one such loose end: we leave the play with our sense of her power and independence fully intact. As Hart writes, "the representation of a return to the 'normal' cannot entirely suppress female transgression" (103).

Frye's discussion of alienated figures in comedy also interests me: he suggests that certain characters are isolated from the action of the play, identifying them as the fool or clown (Lavache, Touchstone, Feste) and the *idiotes* (Don John, Malvolio, Falstaff, Jacques). Such characters, Frye explains, often afford spectators "fitful glimpses of a hidden world which they guard or symbolize. . . . Some of the most haunting speeches in Shakespeare are connected with these shifts of perspective provided by alienated characters" (101). While Shylock, with his "Hath not a Jew" speech, provides the

obvious example of a shift in perspective in *Merchant*, I would suggest that Portia, no less alienated as a woman than Shylock is as a Jew, reveals an equally compelling world. Her "The quality of mercy is not strained" speech advises consideration and compassion, ostensibly female attributes. Yet the woman delivering these lines is also a powerful judge possessed of a shrewd mind, characteristics she retains even after shedding her male identity. In discovering Portia's world, we discover a new, more flexible way of thinking about married women in Renaissance England.

I believe that such discoveries can only be made by way of an analysis that is, in Jonathan Dollimore's words, "at once historically aware and textually sensitive" (*Radical Tragedy* lxiv n55); for this reason I begin my study with a chapter wholly devoted to historical context before moving to the textual specifics of the plays. Heather Dubrow and Richard Strier identify the key questions posed by a historical method: "To what extent does one emphasize the influence of an individual, whether a figure with political power or a poet? To what extent, on the other hand, does one see persons merely as vessels for cultural codes and cultural tensions?" ("Introduction: The Historical Renaissance" 5). My approach is more closely aligned to cultural materialist rather than new historicist thought, since I follow the British school in stressing the subversive potential of the Shakespearean drama: Dollimore "finds in this theatre a substantial challenge; not a vision of political freedom so much as a subversive knowledge of political domination, a knowledge which interrogated prevailing beliefs . . ." (xxi). New historicists, including, for example, Stephen Greenblatt and Steven Mullaney, have tended instead to emphasize this drama's role in reinforcing the dominant order, arguing that potentially subversive social elements are ultimately contained.⁵

I do not, however, propose to employ the subversion/ containment division in any strict sense, for a study of gender requires a greater flexibility than such a dichotomy would allow. While I find *Merchant* to take a more subversive stance than *Mariam*, both plays question patriarchal assumptions to some degree. Yet at the same time, neither can be considered 'feminist' in any modern sense of the word. Because, as Dollimore writes, "gender is implicated in the entire social domain" ("Shakespeare, Cultural Materialism, Feminism and Marxist Humanism" 474), we must follow critics like Kathleen McLuskie and "[seek] to practice the responsibilities of the historian as well as the commitment of the feminist" (475).⁶ Both perspectives—subversion and containment—must inform an examination of these two plays.

I begin, then, with an attempt to contextualize Renaissance woman; given the vastness of this subject and of the body of critical work on it, my examination is necessarily condensed. My discussion of Cary's *Mariam* will follow. Although her play follows *Merchant* chronologically, I wish to begin with Cary because she presents what I consider a representational view of 'woman;' I will conclude by offering a reading of *Merchant* as the more subversive play.

NOTES

¹ One excellent example is the Women Writers in English 1350-1850 series, which presents a wide range of unfamiliar women's texts. See also Diane Purkiss, ed., *Three Tragedies by Renaissance Women*; S.P. Cerasano and Marion Wynne-Davies, eds., *Renaissance Drama By Women: Texts and Documents*; Mary Garman, Judith Applegate, Margaret Benefield, Dortha Meredith, eds., *Hidden in Plain Sight: Quaker Women's Writings 1650-1700*. A recent edition of Margaret Cavendish's *The Convent of Pleasure and Other Plays*, ed. Anne Shaver, is now available, as is one of Elizabeth Cary's *The Tragedy of Mariam the Fair Queen of Jewry*, eds. Barry Weller and Margaret W. Ferguson.

² See, for example, S.P. Cerasano and Marion Wynne-Davies, eds., *Readings in Renaissance Women's Drama and Gloriana's Face: Women, Public and Private, in the English Renaissance*; Anne Haselkorn and Betty Travitsky, eds., *The Renaissance Englishwoman in Print: Counterbalancing the Canon*.

³ I have listened to various young female scholars relate with disgust their undergraduates' expressions of interest in Shakespeare; such teachers prefer to redirect student interest toward a feminist study of women's writing alone (particularly modern women's writing). I would conjecture that students' captivation with Shakespeare will continue for a long time to come; the feminist English instructor might therefore do well to employ that particular energy in encouraging feminist readings, both of Shakespeare and of other texts.

⁴ See also Nancy Cotton Pearse, "Elizabeth Cary, Renaissance Playwright;" Nancy A. Gutierrez, "Valuing Mariam: Genre Study and Feminist Analysis;" Maureen Quilligan, "Staging gender: William Shakespeare and Elizabeth Cary."

⁵ See Stephen Greenblatt, "Invisible Bullets: Renaissance Authority and its Subversion, *Henry IV* and *Henry V*," and Steven Mullaney, "Strange Things, Gross Terms, Curious Customs: the Rehearsal of Cultures in the Late Renaissance."

⁶ See Kathleen McLuskie, "The Patriarchal Bard: Feminist Criticism and Shakespeare: *King Lear* and *Measure for Measure*."

Chapter One



Contexts

*For with my sickle I will cut away
All obstacles, that in her way can grow,
And by the issue of her owne attempt,
I'll make thee labor omnia vincet know.
Rachel Speght, "A Dreame"*

In 1621, Rachel Speght published *Mortalities Memorandum*, a Christian meditation on death, and introduced it: "*Mortalities Memorandum, with A Dreame Prefixed, imaginarie in manner; reall in matter*" (43). In a single, pithy utterance, Speght, the daughter of a Calvinist minister, intimates the central principle of Renaissance woman's lived experience under patriarchy. "A Dreame," which stresses the importance of women's education, is Speght's attempt to dodge the "imaginarie" construction of woman so prevalent in her society; she seeks to provoke an interest in real women and real women's issues that might disable culturally fabricated notions of gender. We shall see that she achieved only a limited success in this endeavor. However, her keen awareness of the discrepancy between real and imagined women does concretize the central problem facing women of her day: the obliteration of self resulting from patriarchal imposition. Speght's work therefore establishes a premise for this chapter,

which will examine the construction of female identity in Renaissance England; my chief interest lies in the role prescribed for the married woman and her experience within that role. As Katherine Usher Henderson and Barbara F. McManus note in their discussion of formal literary debate about women, "because marriage was presumed to be the only vocation for a woman, in looking for connections between the pamphlets and the lives of real women we must examine the institution of marriage" (*Half Humankind* 72).

Rachel Speght, though seldom discussed in academic circles today, was in fact a most remarkable young woman. She was the first Englishwoman to identify herself by name as the author of a defense of women: in 1617, when she was just 19, she published *A Mouzell for Melastomus (A Muzzle for Black Mouth)*, a response to Joseph Swetnam's misogynist tract, *The Arraignment of Lewde, idle, froward, and unconstant women: Or the vanitie of them, choose you whether* (1615).¹ Speght, a skilled writer who opposed Swetnam's various absurd contentions, represents the potential of the female voice prior to marriage. Her selection of the defensive pamphlet genre allowed her to express her ideas publicly, an option which, as we shall see, was not normally open to women.

Speght uses her public voice to expose the ineptitude of her attacker: she characterizes him in opposition to herself, enjoining her female readers to "be not enflamed with choler against this our enraged adversarie, but patiently consider of him according to the portraiture which he hath drawne of himselfe, his Writings the very embleme of a monster" (*The Polemics and Poems of Rachel Speght* 4).² She and all good women possess patience, intelligence, modesty, and the ability to think rationally, the very qualities Swetnam accuses them of lacking. He, by contrast, is a ranting, ludicrous, illogical idiot, which Speght proves through reasonable, well organized argument. Ann

Rosalind Jones explains that although Speght describes herself as "yong, and the unworthiest of thousands" (3), "this opening impression of simplicity is deceptive. Rational deliberation is the leading gambit in Speght's essay . . ." ("Counterattacks on 'the Bayter of Women'" 49).

Speght's refutation of Swetnam's tract merits close attention as one woman's bold and public stance against conventional gender ideology. As Wendy Wall reminds us in her discussion of female authorship, "women might have been caught in legal, social, and economic nets, but some found a way to dance within them quite visibly" (*The Imprint of Gender* 282-83). Authors like Speght, Wall explains, were not silenced by patriarchal conventions, but rather learned to work within such strictures through negotiation and compromise (283). In Speght's case, though, the compromise was particularly oppressive, since it entailed her involvement in an ancient, male-dominated game: the Speght-Swetnam controversy inaugurated the Jacobean phase of the centuries-old *querelle des femmes*, the debate over the nature and worth of womankind.

Linda Woodbridge, in *Women and the English Renaissance*, has dubbed this phase of the *querelle* the "formal controversy," which, as she demonstrates, was enacted through the publication of rhetorically argued pamphlets (note that Woodbridge feels the term "pamphlet" trivializes these works, and is "prejudicial to [their] serious consideration" since it "connotes hasty composition, ephemerality, a popular and indiscriminating readership, and hack work" [7]). Pamphlets written in defense of women, published in the early Tudor period by such authors as Elyot, Vaughan, Gosynhyll, and Agrippa, functioned largely as formal literary exercises; they evinced little concern for real women.³ Authors involved in the debate over women used their

rhetorical prowess to construct both attacks and defenses of women; Gosynhyll wrote one of each, quite likely simultaneously. Woodbridge shows that even the defenses were not actually intended to aid women:

... we have a succession of three defenses of women—Elyot's, Vaughan's, and Gosynhyll's—all of which represent themselves as "defenses" against misogyny but whose traceable literary antecedents are not misogynistic attacks but other defenses. The clear implication is that these pieces were not composed as sincere and pious vindications of a maligned sex but as exercises in a literary genre. (24)

Speght marks her own entrance into the formal controversy with the title page to the *Mouzell*, where she announces her intent to respond to "*that Irreligious and Illiterate Pamphlet made by Io. Sw.*" (1). Speght plans to ground her answer in Swetnam's ignorance, weak logic, and faulty writing in general. She complains in *Certaine Quaeres to the Bayter of Women*, a brief text appended to the *Mouzell*, that Swetnam's writing is "a promiscuous mingle mangle" and is "altogether without methode" (31). Her primary difficulty with Swetnam's text seems to be its failure to comply with the rules of grammar and style; his lack of order prevents her from answering "as a regular Responsarie requireth" (31). Later, she critiques his grammatical errors and his glaring inconsistencies, further emphasizing her concern with literary exactitude.

Speght's in-depth involvement in formal literary standards rather disturbingly allies her with earlier male polemicists: her concern with literary precision recalls their preoccupation with rhetoric. My sense is that she had so internalized her society's positioning of women that she was unwittingly drawn into the old rhetorical game, despite her genuine desire to defend and support her sex. Indeed, Woodbridge argues that Speght was likely not even aware of the formal controversy; she often appears ignorant of its conventions (89). This inadvertent collusion reminds us that locating

power in language could be a forbidding enterprise for the early modern woman; first she had to define a language of her own. We recall, for example, the lengthy, painful, essentially powerless speeches of Shakespeare's Lucrece: no matter how much she vocalizes her grief, "she can never be authorised by a language that is [Tarquin's] language, by a culture that is his culture, or by a land that is his land" (Camino 61). Speght's involvement in the formal controversy becomes especially troubling when we consider that Swetnam's *Arraignement* was probably a cooperative effort by the author and his bookseller, Thomas Archer, to initiate a profitable debate; once the tract was published, Archer likely commissioned Speght to write a response that would fuel the conflict (Lewalski xv). We might say, then, that Speght was ultimately more confined than liberated by her use of the defensive pamphlet genre.

Speght's inadvertent acceptance of the conventions of the highly constructed *querelle des femmes* suggests the extent to which women were themselves constructed in Renaissance England. So fabricated was the notion of female identity in this period that even a discerning, educated woman like Speght failed to claw her way out of it. We must nevertheless applaud her fortitude in undertaking the *Mouzell*, for in the attempt itself we glimpse at least a measure of influence and autonomy: in Speght we recognize the potential of the unmarried female self. Sadly, though, Speght's expression of self was short-lived: the *Mouzell* was published once, while Swetnam's *Arraignement* went through 10 editions by 1637, and 6 more by 1880. Worse still, after her marriage, we know nothing of Rachel Speght at all. Her fate—silence through marriage—represents the experience of virtually all wives in Renaissance England, with the exception of a handful of upper class married women writers like Mary Sidney Herbert, Mary Wroth, Lady

Eleanor Davies, and Margaret Cavendish. For the most part, any degree of female self-discovery or self-expression necessarily ceased upon marriage.

In light of this truth, Speght's brief foray into publication seems all the more laudable. To publish one's written work was tantamount to public speech, a liberty denied to women in general, married or single.⁴ Contemporary conduct books for women, which outline appropriate female behavior, frequently invoke the social dictate against women's speech. Juan Luis Vives' *Instruction of a Christen Woman* (1530), reprinted over forty times during the sixteenth century, indicates this firmly entrenched standard:

For it neither becometh a woman to rule a schole, nor to lyve amonge men, or speke abroad, and shake of her demurenes and honestie, eyther all together or els a great parte: whiche if she be good, it were better to be at home within and unknowen to other folkes. And in company to holde her tonge demurely. And let fewe se her, and none at al here her. (25)

Similarly, Thomas Salter, in *The Mirrhor of Modestie* (1579), which delineates common expectations regarding women's education and behavior, writes, "I would not have her that will attire her minde by this *Mirrhor*, to be a babbler or greate talker, but to consider that alwaies much babbling and speaking is occasion of many faultes . . ." (49). William Gouge agrees; in the section of his marriage manual *Of Domesticall Duties* (1622) entitled *Of a wives reverend speech to her husband*, he insists that "a wives reverence is manifested by her speech, both in her husbands presence, and also in his absence. For this end in his presence her words must be few, reverend, and meeke" (116). Such authors evinced a particular fondness for Pauline doctrine; an oft-repeated verse was 1 Timothy 2:12: "I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent."⁵

Feminine silence was enjoined as a method of bolstering obedience: without the use of words, a wife would find it difficult to challenge her husband's authority. Silence was also thought to heighten a woman's femininity; female involvement in learned discourse was an utterly unappealing notion. Perhaps the most important justification for women's silence, though, was the idea that loquacity signified unchastity. Elizabeth Cary's *Tragedy of Mariam* illustrates this concept when King Herod invokes his suspicion of female voice in order to justify Mariam's murder:

It may be so: nay, 'tis so: she's unchaste,
Her mouth will ope to ev'ry stranger's ear:
Then let the executioner make haste,
Lest she enchant him, if her words he hear.⁶ (4.7.433-46)

Chastity was deemed by far the most important characteristic of the early modern woman. Vives writes:

For in a woman the honestie is in stede of all. . . . Take from a woman her beautie, take from her kynrede, riches, comelynes, eloquence, sharpenes of wytte, counnyng in her crafte, gyve her chastite, and thou hast gyven her al thynges. And on that other syde, gyve her all these thynges, and calle her a noughty packe, with that one worde thou haste taken all from her, and hast left her bare and foule. (27)

A married woman, moreover, had to be chaste in both body and mind; chastity must not merely be enacted, but internalized. Otherwise, a wife risked arousing suspicion through her careless speech or flippant behavior, thereby jeopardizing her husband's honor. Hence wifely chastity was even more vital than maidenly chastity, since a wife could dishonor not only God and her parents, but also her husband, her children, her marriage vows, and society at large. Husbands harbored a particular fear of wifely infidelity because it could raise questions about paternity, threatening the validity of their lineage (this anxiety was at the heart of the cuckold jokes permeating Elizabethan and

Restoration drama). Enforced silence, then, along with the parallel stricture against appearing in public, was employed largely to preserve male control over female sexuality, which by extension maintained patriarchal mores.⁷

This construction of the Renaissance wife as silent, chaste, and, of course, obedient was integral to the principles of companionate marriage, a dominant ideology of marriage in England which developed during the sixteenth century. This emerging ideology, grounded in Erasmian humanism, served to challenge long held Catholic marriage doctrine. In contrast to early Catholic belief, Erasmus' writings privileged marriage and family over virginity; his colloquy "The Girl with No Interest in Marriage," for example, argues against convent life. In this colloquy, Catherine, a young woman, expresses her desire to enter a convent. Her companion Eubulus tries to discourage this idea by stressing the virtues of both married life and filial obedience; he urges her to "marry a husband of similar tastes and establish a new community at home" (106). Entering a convent, he explains, is unnecessary: rather than practice obedience as a nun, she may do so in her parents' home (and later her husband's); she may also preserve her virginity under her parents' supervision. Eubulus paints marriage as the obvious (and only) choice for a young woman; in the sequel to this colloquy, "The Repentant Girl," the once-determined Catherine flees the convent after twelve days.

Erasmus strengthened the case in favor of marriage with his *Encomium matrimonii* (1518), which avows the inherent holiness of marriage and attempts to naturalize sexuality. Moreover, the text makes the radical assertion that blame for marital difficulties should not be laid entirely upon women; indeed, Erasmus suggests that husbands acknowledge their wives' goodness, and stresses that men are responsible for

their own marital conduct. Humanists tended to emphasize friendship and mutual affection in marriage: Vives' *Instruction of a Christen Woman* and *The Office and Duetie of an Husband* (1555?) argue for fellowship between husbands and wives. All sixteenth-century commentators on marriage described the main goals of marriage as companionship, procreation, and the prevention of fornication. However, prior to the humanist contribution, the latter two purposes took precedence over companionship; humanist influence resulted in a greater stress on marital love and mutuality.⁸

Proponents of companionate marriage, however, despite their focus on marital friendship, were hardly concerned with egalitarian relations between men and women. As Valerie Wayne explains in her introduction to Edmund Tilney's *The Flower of Friendship* (1568), fellowship did not encompass equality: "... the humanist's concern is not whether husbands and fathers have greater power, but how they should use it: Vives ... advises kindness and affection in marital relations while implying that wives are as inferior as children" (27). Humanist ideology invariably emphasized female subjection; although Erasmus' character Eubulus informs Catherine that entering a convent will mean losing her freedom, it becomes apparent that her life at home is equally, if not more, confining. Eubulus asks her, "Since you're not emancipated from the authority of your parents, since you've no legal right to sell clothes or field, how do you contrive the right to give yourself into bondage under somebody else?" (110). Clearly, Catherine will be no less in "bondage" at home than in a convent. Moreover, her parents will eventually "give" her to a husband, and, no longer their possession, she will belong to him. Eubulus does not question, as he purports to, male ownership of women; he merely denies Catherine the right to choose that owner.

Wayne points to a continuity among humanist, Protestant, and Puritan approaches to marriage, as illustrated by Erasmus' dialogue *Coniugium* (1523), which stresses the importance of wifely obedience. *Coniugium* addresses the practical difficulties women face within marriage, suggesting that wives might improve their situations by changing their own behavior. Xanthippe, a shrew, complains to her friend Eulalia (meaning "sweetly speaking") of her husband's constant drinking and whoring. Eulalia explains how she contrived to secure her own husband's affection and avert marital discord:

If my husband seemed quite depressed and I had no chance to appeal to him, I wouldn't laugh or joke, as some women like to do, but I too put on a somber, worried look. As a mirror, if it's a good one, always gives back the image of the person looking at it, so should a wife reflect her husband's mood, not being gay when he's sad or merry when he's upset. But whenever he was more upset than usual, I'd either soothe him with pleasant conversation or defer to his anger in silence until he cooled off and an opportunity came to correct or advise him. (119)

The idea that women were capable of actively modifying their own situations demonstrates "the humanist assumption that women are rational creatures . . . rather than naturally perverse beings or intransigent marital partners" (Wayne 30). This assumption, Wayne notes, "offered wives a subject position from which to speak" (37). Of course, even such innovative humanist thinking remained mired in the principle of wifely obedience: Eulalia reminds Xanthippe that "Paul teaches that wives should be obedient to their husbands in all subjection" (117). Men should, ideally, treat their wives kindly, but as Eulalia points out, "when things have come to such a pass that one person must yield to another, the wife should give way to the husband" (117). *Coniugium* ultimately suggests that wifely insubordination creates wicked husbands.⁹

Coniugium was later adapted by Lutherans and translated into German; it was then translated into English as a Protestant text. The Lutheran adaptations present a

solidly hierarchical view of marriage, depicting men as innately holier than women. Still later, Puritans adapted *Conjugium*: Robert Snawsel's *A Looking Glasse for Married Folkes* (1610, 1619, 1631) modifies the Lutheran insistence on hierarchy by stressing that husbands and wives should submit both to God and to each other, but maintains a firmly biblical foundation. William Whately's *A Bride Bush* (1617) discusses the mutuality of marriage: husbands and wives are meant to love and help one another. But R. Vaerie Lucas argues that in *A Bride Bush*, "the coercive and repressive nature of patriarchy is disguised through the notion of 'partnership' and the claim that obedience to one's husband is part of one's duty to God himself" ("Puritan Preaching and the Politics of the Family" 229). Similarly, Gouge describes the marital responsibilities of both husbands and wives in *Of Domesticall Duties*—he even provides cross-references to husbands' duties in the section for wives—while insisting that although wives rank above servants, they must still obey in a comparable fashion to servants, "because God hath made them all inferiours, and exacted subjection of all" (114-15). Puritan divines thus worked to disseminate the humanist view of marriage between the 1580s and the 1630s, advocating a reciprocal form of marriage, albeit a form that was upheld, as Akiko Kusunoki writes, "only through wives' submission to their husbands' authority" ("Their Testament at Their Apron-Strings" 186).

Protestant thought, then, evidently did little to effect positive change for women, despite its glorification of marriage and its emphasis on love between the sexes. Linda T. Fitz suggests that "the exaltation of marriage might be seen as a high price to pay for making wives respectable, considering that along with it went the annihilation of alternatives to marriage" ("What Says the Married Woman?" 8).¹⁰ At the very least,

Catholic doctrine provided a choice for women: those who did not wish to marry could enter a convent. That option denied them, women were compelled to participate in a rigidly patriarchal marriage system. In *The Family, Sex and Marriage* Lawrence Stone explains that "the principal result of the Reformation was the heavy responsibility placed by Protestantism upon the head of the household to supervise the religious and moral conduct of its members The triumphant emphasis on patriarchy as one of the benefits of the Lutheran Reformation is here unmistakable" (154). Operating under the auspices of love and friendship in marriage, Protestantism contrived to elevate male authority to new heights and to reinforce female obedience.

According to proponents of companionate marriage theory, the female subjection so vital to patriarchal marriage comes naturally to the wife who is truly 'in love.' In her discussion of wifely virtues, Ruth Kelso writes that "love may be set down as a most important virtue for the wife because it serves as a motivating force behind the other virtues, in fact behind the wife's whole existence" (*Doctrine for the Lady of the Renaissance* 104). Wives were encouraged to demonstrate their love, a feat most easily accomplished through a kind of mimicry. Ideally, as we learn from Erasmus' character Eulalia, a wife would upon marriage erase her sense of self and learn to mirror her husband in all things: "she should be glad or sorry as he is, and be of the same mind as far as possible" (Kelso 104). According to Tilney's *The Flower of Friendship*, a man should not be satisfied with his wife's chastity alone, but should gradually "steale away hir private will, and appetite, so that of two bodies there may be made one onely hart, which she will soone doe, if love raigne in hir" (442-44). 'Love' might thus be defined as female self-effacement: marriage makes of two people a single heart, but that heart

will always be the husband's. Thus Catherine Belsey writes that companionate marriage bolsters patriarchy "to the extent that true love becomes the solvent of inequality, the source of women's pliability and the guarantee of marital concord. . . . Love makes slavery blessed" (*The Subject of Tragedy* 214). Of interest here is Foucault's discussion of Bentham's *Panopticon*. Foucault writes that prisoners in such a structure—isolated, yet perpetually under surveillance—eventually come to regulate their own behavior; force is unnecessary, since the prisoner "inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection" (*Discipline and Punish* 202-03). So too did the constructed notion of love compel the Renaissance wife to survey her own behavior and accept her inferiority.

Women's inclination to feel and express love was often characterized as an innate element of female nature in the early modern period. Lillian S. Robinson provides an example of this phenomenon in *Sex, Class, and Culture*, where she examines three sixteenth-century works, Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* (1515), Tasso's *Jerusalem Delivered* (1600), and Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* (1590); specifically, she discusses the military metaphor pervading these poems, observing that it came to dominate many facets of social life within the poems' settings (the time of Charlemagne, the First Crusade, and Arthurian England, respectively). Since women had no function in the military sphere, nor did they merit a place in this social structure. Indeed, "the [medieval] state itself . . . was seen as having a masculine character" (165). Emerging capitalism, however, brought new priorities to the state: "balance and flexibility were the qualities needed in the bourgeois state and in those who would direct its course" (167). As it happens, these necessary qualities are the very attributes considered dominant in women and wanting in

men. For this reason, Robinson explains, Ariosto, Tasso, and Spenser all feature at least one female warrior character in their poems; these women introduce into the state the virtues typically thought to belong to a lady: love, kindness, pliability, mercy. "It was not *women* the early modern state required," writes Robinson, "but a principle, a set of qualities that the contemporary culture defined as feminine" (169).

Shakespeare's Portia ostensibly fulfills this same requirement. The idea that Portia imbues the harsh male world of Venice with feminine balance and mercy has become a commonplace in criticism of *The Merchant of Venice*; time and again critics have recited her "The quality of mercy is not strained" speech as evidence of her intrinsically loving nature. Joan Ozark Holmer, in her recent book on *Merchant*, writes of Portia that "love is her motive" (*The Merchant of Venice: Choice, Hazard and Consequence* 117). As we shall see, however, Portia's qualities range far beyond love alone. To construct her as merely loving and gentle is to confine her to the early modern understanding of 'woman,' a problematic positioning, since the loving woman, as we have seen, was the woman most adept at subjection, and least in possession of a self.

We might expect this newly formulated ideal of love-marriage to preclude the view of marriage as a system of inheritance and economics which, in the early modern period, was "so ingrained and pervasive that the emotional affections or physical desires of a man and woman diminished in importance" (McDonald 262). Tilney's *Flower* opposes mercenary marriage, as does Cary's *Mariam*, which, as we shall see, stresses that true love is possible between master and servant. However, financial considerations were not easily disposed of, and in fact played a major role in cementing the wifely submission so key to perpetuating male dominance within companionate marriage. In considering

the principles of egalitarian marriage, Tilney emphasizes the humanist idea that only a woman's virtue, and not her birth or rank, can make her equal to her husband. Female virtue, however, is defined in economic terms when Master Pedro, the text's advocate for women and marriage, argues that men should not marry wealthy women, and that women should be married without dowries, thereby leaving wives with "nothing to be prowde off, save onely their vertues, which ought to be accounted the chiefest dowrie" (304-6). Similarly, Ben Jonson's Truewit warns Morose in *Epicoene* (c. 1609) that marriage to a wealthy woman can be perilous: "If rich and that you marry her dowry, not her, she'll reign in your house as imperious as a widow. If noble, all her kindred will be your tyrants" (2.2.58-60). Later, Morose voices the same idea himself to his barber: "I know what thou wouldst say, she's poor and her friends deceased; she has brought a wealthy dowry in her silence, Cutbeard, and in respect of her poverty, Cutbeard, I shall have her more loving and obedient, Cutbeard" (2.5.78-81).¹¹ Women and men, as Wayne explains in her introduction to Tilney, are thus made 'equal' according to different criteria: men define their class positions through economic relationships, while women's are defined by sexual relationships (55). Gerda Lerner points to the same pattern in Ancient Mesopotamia, in classical antiquity, and in slave societies: "For women, class is mediated through their sexual ties to a man" (*The Creation of Patriarchy* 215).

Marriage divested a woman of whatever money or property she did bring into the relationship; indeed, she became property herself. Writers of the period, including Erasmus and Bullinger, advocated a 'common purse' within marriage, but as Kathleen M. Davies states, "community of goods was . . . stronger in theory than in practice" ("Continuity and Change in Literary Advice on Marriage" 66). Stone explains that "by

marriage, the husband and wife became one person in law—and that person was the husband. He acquired absolute control of all his wife's personal property, which he could sell at will" (195). A wife had little or no financial say, nor did she have a voice in any other matter: we recall Tilney's counsel that a husband should "steale away" his wife's will and appetite. There exists a disquieting conflation here between women and property: a wife's self is 'stolen' from her; her status as a married woman constructs her as the property of her husband. She turns over to his control both her money and her identity. That this act of wifely self-dispossession forms a vital component of companionate marriage illustrates the extent to which this ideology worked to preserve female subordination.

Early modern wives, then, functioned primarily as commodities in a male-governed marketplace. Heather Dubrow writes of the marriage manuals that their "language of debt and obligation makes sexuality seem . . . a mercantile commodity subject to measurement and control" (*A Happier Eden* 25). Women were not people, but objects to be exchanged between one man and another. Here we should note the Aristotelian influence: in *The Politics* Aristotle refutes Plato's notion of government in the *Republic* because, as Constance Jordan explains, "it ignored the crucial role of property, and of women as property, in stabilizing relations between men" (*Renaissance Feminism* 33). Aristotle writes:

... in a state having women and children in common, love will be diluted; and the father will certainly not say 'my son,' or the son 'my father.' As a little sweet wine mingled with a great deal of water is imperceptible in the mixture, so, in this sort of community, the idea of relationship which is based upon these names will be lost . . . (35)

The ownership and exchange of women consolidates male power by creating indissoluble bonds among society's most influential males; as Jordan puts it, "the transgenerational stability of a family and hence a society depends on treating each woman as the property of an individual man" (43).¹²

This male need to commodify women resulted in the conflation of women and money in the early modern period that I have already described. Commodification of the marriage relationship by way of materializing wives was a thoroughly accepted practice, notwithstanding the ideals of companionate marriage. Interestingly, though, financial considerations were not supposed to factor into male-male relationships. Alan Bray, in his article "Homosexuality and the Signs of Male Friendship in Elizabethan England," describes the culturally assumed features of male friendship. These conventions included the need for male friends to be of a similar social standing, and for their attachments to be of a personal, rather than a mercenary, nature. What happened when these traits were lacking in male friendships? Bray explains:

If someone had acquired a place in society to which he was not entitled by nature and could then perhaps even lord it over those who were naturally his betters, the specter likely to be conjured up in the mind of an Elizabethan was not the orderly relationship of friendship between men but rather the profoundly disturbing image of the sodomite, that enemy not only of nature but of the order of society and the proper kinds and divisions within it. (51)

Two of the very characteristics deemed useful to early modern marriage—unequal class positioning and the objectification of humans—were made anathema to the male bond. Since such factors should only characterize male-female relationships, men who incorporated them into their relations with other men (by, for example, becoming friends

with a man of 'base' birth) were judged sexually deviant. There was something very wrong about conflating money and male love.

And yet this conflation, as Bray makes clear, still occurred among men. Bray suggests that egalitarian, emotionally-based relations, so crucial to male friendship, were "often absent in daily life" (52). Indeed, the word 'friend,' Bray notes, "points to that network of subtle bonds amongst influential patrons and their clients, suitors, and friends at court. . . . To be someone's 'bedfellow' suggested that one had influence and could be the making of a fortune" (42). Evidently male relationships could seldom if ever be enacted on a purely personal level; issues of money and property remained perpetually in view. Early modern man, it seems, was forever failing to disentangle money and people—women and men alike.

It has been my chief purpose in this chapter to describe Renaissance woman as she was constructed by her male contemporaries. In her most ideal form, we have seen, she was silent, chaste, and obedient. She was destined for marriage, desiring nothing more than to be a loving wife, subject in all things to her husband. She felt no compulsion to operate in the public realm, but concerned herself with duties befitting a wife—namely, pleasing her husband with her expert household management. Such perfection was most easily realized through her divestiture of all money and personal property upon marriage. And yet, despite the prevalence of this construction in the period, not every woman, of course, bowed to it unquestioningly. I would like at this point to look at Elizabeth I, the major early modern example of female individualism, certainly because she subverted the social dictate that women were to marry, but also because she specifically reconfigured female economic subordination.

Susan Frye's major study of Elizabeth, *Elizabeth I: The Competition for Representation*,¹³ examines the queen's struggle to forge an identity for herself, despite her society's perception of her as a subject to be created. "Elizabeth's struggle for self-definition within this matrix," writes Frye, "for control of a body constructed by the male expectations surrounding her, is visible in her own representations and the importance she attached to them" (11). How was Elizabeth to circumvent male control of her female body, while still presenting herself as appropriately virtuous? A challenging endeavor, since virtue (meaning, of course, primarily chastity) was an essential quality in women, but one which rendered them powerless, as it entailed submitting to male authority. In Frye's words, Elizabeth "needed a category that would be familiar to her society but that would place her beyond the restrictions usually imposed on women" (15). The answer, of course, was to construct herself as a virgin queen, a woman who "could permit no male to possess her, since by definition her father and brother were dead and there could be no husband in the picture" (15). Elizabeth brilliantly contrived both to illustrate her virtue and remove herself from male control. "Ironically," write S.P. Cerasano and Marion Wynne-Davies, "it was the Virgin Queen's decision not to marry that enabled her to exert authoritative monarchic control and to act as a redemptive force for the Protestant cause" ("From Myself, My Other Self I Turned" 14).

What interests me most about Elizabeth is her ability to bolster this shrewd self-representation with economic power. Frye discusses *The Queen's Majesty's Passage*, an account of the coronation, noting that the text attempts to situate Elizabeth as a submissive recipient of the city's (the Court of Aldermen's) powerful economic support. Elizabeth was to exchange obedience for money—a familiar pattern of female

commodification. Yet as Frye explains, this constructed pattern did not hold true in Elizabeth's reign, since "everyday financial relations required the realization that the queen was not city property, a wife or daughter, but an entity apart from paternalistic categories. . . . In the early years of Elizabeth's reign, the economic reality was that Crown and city actively cooperated for their mutual gain" (49). Elizabeth's initial self-representation as a pliant and obedient subject was merely momentary. Its function was to secure the merchants' assistance in borrowing money and establishing her credit rating abroad; it cemented the relationship between Crown and city, which proved lucrative to both. The money and influence resulting from this relationship "in turn allowed the queen to consolidate her power while she took greater control of her representation" (54). Elizabeth fulfilled the expectations set out by her society, but in doing so collapsed them entirely. She was virtuous virgin and obedient servant only insofar as these roles afforded her power and wealth. It appears, then, that the queen met the male-constructed vision of her identity with a construction of her own, fabricated by her own wit and deployed to her own benefit.

While Elizabeth proves useful as a visible example of female subversion of male authority, we should not forget that similar behavior likely occurred among ordinary Renaissance women. The very fact that men found it so necessary to invoke a certain constructed female identity, and to restate its importance again and again, suggests that women exhibited a troublesome tendency to think and act independently (a tendency perhaps bolstered, as we shall find in looking at Elizabeth Cary, by the Protestant emphasis on the individual conscience). As Fitz puts it, "There is much to suggest that the basic reason for these reiterated exhortations of women to stay in their kitchens and

be subservient is that women were not staying in their kitchens or being subservient. . . . Masculine moralists preached home-keeping and domesticity precisely *because* the woman of the English Renaissance was more inclined towards outrageous liberty" (11). Fitz cites the common motif of shrew-taming in Elizabethan literature, along with the many ballads featuring husband-beating and even husband-murder, as evidence that female obedience and silence were exhorted not in the vein of confident assertions of the status quo, but as a kind of "desperate defense" (13).¹⁴

Perhaps active self-creation, which would certainly have been perceived as an "outrageous liberty," was practiced not only by Queen Elizabeth, but by many early modern women; perhaps it was the only viable method of counteracting patriarchal definitions. After all, women had to contend with a barrage of rhetoric attempting to convince them to accept their subordinate status; Lucas points out that "since the Act of 1593 required everyone over the age of sixteen to attend Sunday church service 'or in default be hanged or banished,' it seems that preachers had a captive audience from all social classes" (226). Puritan divines took advantage of their position to impose rhetorical strategies designed to "[persuade] female congregations to accept their subjection in the household" (Kusunoki 187). Constrained to swallow an identity foisted upon them from the pulpit, women may have reacted by selecting alternate, more functional identities. Elizabeth selected the virgin queen; later, Speght chose the pious minister's daughter—the only persona that would let her be heard publicly. For some women, no doubt, the most effective identity was shrew.

The problem, of course, is that each of these identities was still implicated in patriarchal constructs. Women remained limited even in rebellion: Speght was unable to

write her way out of the formal *querelle*; Elizabeth selected the principles of virtue and obedience to fuel her authority out of sheer necessity. Such female internalization of social commonplaces leaves us struggling for an understanding of genuine Renaissance women—outside the construction, what sorts of lives did they lead? This chapter has assumed that our first task is to identify the construction itself: this information reveals to us the origins and purpose of the stirrings of female voice in this period. Women may not have dismantled the construction, but they were beginning to work within it. In the early seventeenth century, Rachel Speght was still mired in orthodoxy, but her spirit and vision are undeniable. Her work looks ahead to a time of greater flexibility for women, a time when, as she writes in "A Dreame," labor, not love, would conquer all things.

NOTES

¹ Speght's surprisingly firm sense of herself and of her identity as an author is further evidenced by the fact that she wrote *Mortalities Memorandum* partly to discredit claims that her father, not she, had authored the *Mouzell*: "... I am now, as by a strong motive induced (for my rights sake) to produce and divulge this offspring of my indeavour, to prove them further futurely who have formerly deprived my of my due, imposing my abortive upon the father of me, but not of it" (*The Polemics and Poems of Rachel Speght* 45). Two other responses to Swetnam's tracts appeared later: *Ester hath hang'd Haman* by Ester Sowernam (punning on Swetnam) and *The Worming of a mad Dogge* by Constantia Munda. Ostensibly written by women, both were published pseudonymously, as was, initially, Swetnam's *Arraignement* (Speght disclosed his identity). The *Arraignement* also provoked an anonymous play, *Swetnam the Woman-hater Arraigned by Women*. Speght alone responded under her own name.

² Speght continues to relish her role as public instructor in the dedication to *Mortalities Memorandum*:

Amongst diversitie of motives to induce the divulging of that to publique view, which was devoted to private Contemplation, none is worthy to precede desire of common benefit. Come kept close in a garner feeds not the hungry; A candle put under a bushell doth not illuminate an house; None but unprofitable servants knit up Gods talent in a Napkin. (45)

Speght's allusion to her public role echoes through the remainder of the dedication, which is addressed to her godmother, Marie Moundford. Speght writes of Mrs. Moundford's declaration of the baptismal vows that "hereby the world may wnesse, that the promise you made for me, when I could make none for myselfe, my carefull friends (amongst whom I must repute your ever esteemed selfe) have beene circumspect to see performed" (46). Mrs. Moundford's public pronounciation, made in Rachel's name,

seems almost to presage the female authorial voice the adult Speght would ultimately adopt; once she is able to speak for herself, she does, rather than allow male voices to subsume hers.

³ Sir Thomas Elyot, *The Defense of Good Women* (1540); Robert Vaughan, *A Dyalogue defensyue for women, agaynst malycyous detractours* (1542); Edward Gosynhyll, *The Scolle house of women* (1542?) and *Mulierum Pean* (1542?); Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim, *A Treatise of the Nobilitie and excellencye of woman kynde* (1542). Of these, Agrippa's defense seems to exhibit the most feminist potential. In his clever defense of Eve, he claims that God forbade the fruit *before* Eve was created; the stricture therefore did not apply to her. Woodbridge argues, however, that this outrageous and heretical argument was not meant to be taken seriously; Agrippa's likely intent was merely to amuse his readers through his own ingenuity (40).

⁴ Most women who dared to publish anything other than devotional literature offered the standard, requisite excuse that they were driven to do so of necessity: perhaps their sex had been disparaged and they were thus forced to respond, or they had been reluctantly pushed into print by friends or relations. Wendy Wall cites John Davies' admonition to the Countess of Bedford, the Countess of Pembroke, and Elizabeth Cary: "You presse the Presse with little you have made" (*The Imprint of Gender* 279). Such prodding was evidently an important device for the woman who wished to see her name in print. An interesting study of the problematic nature of women's writing in the mid-to-late seventeenth century is Elaine Hobby's *Virtue of Necessity*.

⁵ Other examples of books addressed to a female audience and specifically exhorting their silence include Thomas Becon, *Works* (1564); Henry Smith, *A preparative to marriage* (1591); Robert Cleaver, *A godly form of householde government* (1598); Giovanni Michele Bruto, *The necessarie, fit, and convenient education of a yong gentlewoman* (English translation 1598); Robert Greene, *Penelopes web* (1583); Barnabe Rich, *The excellency of good women* (1613); John Taylor, *The needles excellency* (1631). Rich and Greene, among others, used their title pages to entice women readers quite deliberately; *Penelopes web* is introduced as a story, but its main purpose is to enforce the values of female obedience, chastity, and silence. Suzanne W. Hull remarks that "even their escape literature reminded women that they must be obedient, chaste, and silent" (*Chaste, Silent & Obedient* 81).

⁶ For an extended discussion on female public speech in *Mariam*, see Margaret W. Ferguson, "Running On With Almost Public Voice: The Case of E.C."

⁷ For discussion on the historical development of male control of female sexuality, see Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy* 101-22. Using collections of Mesopotamian law, Lerner discusses the increasing restrictions on women's sexual rights over a thousand-year period, and illustrates how such restrictions were integral to the formation of the patriarchal family.

⁸ See Margo Todd, "Humanists, Puritans, and the Spiritualized Household." Todd explains that humanism, rather than Protestantism, originated the stress on companionship (21).

⁹ Wayne observes Erasmus' inconsistency on this point; in the *Encomium* he insists that evil men create evil wives. There was in fact "no single Erasmian position on marriage offered during the sixteenth century" (Wayne 23-24). Constance Jordan comments that Erasmus "varies his views with the kind of text he writes and the audience he addresses" (*Renaissance Feminism* 56).

¹⁰ Fitz's article disputes the work of historians, such as Juliet Dusinberre (*Shakespeare and the Nature of Woman*), who have linked the Renaissance movement to love-marriage with modern feminist attitudes: "What historians like Dusinberre have demonstrated, in short, is that the Renaissance view of women was very marriage-oriented; what they have ignored is the extent to which the modern feminist movement has taken pains to break down the woman-as-wife stereotype" (2).

¹¹ Interestingly, male hypergamy in the early modern period is said to have been less acceptable than female hypergamy; in *Twelfth Night* Malvolio is ridiculed for dreaming of marriage to Olivia, while Olivia cautions herself against loving one of lower status than herself: "Not too fast; soft, soft/ Unless the master were the man" (1.5.279-80). Vivien Brodsky Elliott indicates that almost 40 percent of migrant women in London who married widowers were servants who "occupied well-defined subordinate positions within the household and in marrying their masters were moving upwards socially . . ." ("Single Women in the London Marriage Market" 88-89). Lawrence Stone, however, has termed 1540-1640 "the century of mobility," noting that marriage was also a common method for men to move upward socially ("Social Mobility in England, 1500-1700" 48, 35). The core of the issue lies, perhaps, less in the practice of male hypergamy than in its acceptability.

¹² Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick discusses this principle in *Between Men*; she applies the term 'homosocial' to the male-male relationship in Shakespeare's sonnets, suggesting that this and similar bonds work to preserve the dominant culture (34). I take up Sedgwick's work in more detail in Chapter 3.

¹³ Earlier major studies of Elizabeth include Wallace MacCaffrey, *The Shaping of the Elizabethan Regime*; John E. Neale, *Elizabeth I and Her Parliaments, 1584-1601* and *Queen Elizabeth I: A Biography*; Roy Strong, *The Cult of Elizabeth: Elizabethan Portraiture and Pageantry* and *Gloriana: The Portraits of Queen Elizabeth I*.

¹⁴ Patrick Collinson, reading Whately and Gouge, questions the existence of a truly "hard line" in husband-wife relations:

If such absolute monarchy existed why did both Whately and Gouge find it necessary to warn wives not to address their husbands as Tom, Dick or Ned, or with such ridiculous nicknames as 'duck,' 'chick,' and 'pigsnie'? The Kentish politician Sir Edward Dering addressed his wife as "My dear and comfortable Numpes." (*The Birthpangs of Protestant England* 73)

Chapter Two



Representations of Companionate Marriage in Cary's Mariam

*I know by fits he show'd some signs of love,
And yet not love, but raging lunacy . . .*

The Tragedy of Mariam 1.2.123-24

Near the end of Elizabeth Cary's *Tragedy of Mariam*, King Herod informs his wife that she "shalt die in the despite of love" (4.4.216). He loves Mariam, but his patriarchal duty takes precedence over the whims of his heart: "Thou shalt not live, fair fiend, to cozen more" (4.4.213). Cary's play overflows with such confused notions of love: Herod, evidently a zealous lover, rejects Doris, to whom his oaths once "came pouring like the rain" (2.3.239), in favor of the resplendent Mariam, his "rare creature," his "more than happy fate" (4.1.10,40). Suddenly, however, he opts to execute this new and beloved wife, a decision based on his essentially groundless suspicion that she has been unfaithful. Similarly, Herod's sister Salome loves passionately, but the object of her love also tends to shift somewhat rapidly; as *Mariam* begins she is scheming to marry a third husband. Mariam, for her part, vacillates between tears and exultation at the news of Herod's death, expressing her inner conflict with the sententious line, "One object yields both grief and joy" (1.1.10). Such muddled figurations of love demand some explanation: exactly what is love, or what meaning do these characters affix to the term?

If, in tackling this question, we turn to the Renaissance fashionings of love and marriage surrounding the writing of Cary's play, we recall that the ideology of companionate marriage had become culturally entrenched by this time: Puritan divines like William Gouge and William Whately were continuing to foster the illusion of equality and mutuality within marital partnerships while in fact promoting an unbending patriarchal hierarchy.

Cary's *Mariam* supports the prevailing contemporary notion of 'love-marriage' or companionate marriage by suggesting that one might find it by breaking with patriarchal custom: Pheroras defies Herod in order to marry a servant, while Salome announces her intention to divorce Constabarus, a privilege "barr'd from women" (1.4.306). And yet still we find, just as we do in the writings of Gouge and Whately, that companionate marriage remains inextricably linked to patriarchal function; that is, it remains rigidly qualified by traditional gender roles and social positioning. I would suggest that the confusion surrounding the idea of love in *Mariam* grows out of the conflicted nature of the 'new' Protestant ideal of marriage in the Renaissance: the movement from dynastic or mercenary marriage to companionate marriage, which *Mariam* evidently endorses, in fact does little to alter husband-wife relationships. The term 'love' signifies female self-effacement: marriage merges a couple into a single heart, but that heart will always belong to the husband. Viewed in this light, Cary's play, which in places does attempt to interrogate women's status as subordinate beings, becomes representative of Renaissance and early seventeenth-century marriage theory.

Elizabeth Cary, born Elizabeth Tanfield to strict Protestant parents near the end of the sixteenth century, evidently internalized and indeed enacted the role of inferior,

owned wife prescribed for women of her time. She was initiated into this pattern of behavior early in life by parents determined to educate their daughter in prevailing Protestant ideology. Consequently, as Karen L. Raber explains, Cary's upbringing "compelled her acceptance of hegemonic Protestant conceptions of marriage and woman's place" ("Gender and the Political Subject in *The Tragedy of Mariam*" 323). Sir Lawrence and Lady Elizabeth Tanfield were reputedly stern, arrogant people, widely disliked by their neighbors. Lady Tanfield was particularly severe with her daughter. An only child with no friends of her age, the isolated Elizabeth turned her whole attention to books, often reading through the night. Her mother, upon discovering this habit, forbid her daughter candles. But Elizabeth was a resourceful child, and bribed the servants to smuggle candles into her room: "in this fashion was she in debt a hundred pound afore she was twelve year old" (*The Lady Falkland: Her Life* 188).¹ She was indeed a voracious reader, and managed to teach herself French, Spanish, Italian, Latin, and Hebrew. When she was twelve her father gave her Calvin's *Institutes of Religion*; having read it, she promptly pointed out to him the various internal contradictions she perceived in the text. Such precocity, especially when invoked to the detriment of Calvin's writings, must have been deeply distressing to the Protestant Tanfields.

In June of 1602, Elizabeth's parents contracted an alliance between their daughter and Sir Henry Cary, and Elizabeth was married at age seventeen. Nancy Cotton Pearse explains that the marriage "fulfilled its purpose—the family alliance with the Carys raised Tanfield from the upper middle class into the gentry, and the Tanfield fortune raised Henry Cary from the gentry into the peerage" ("Elizabeth Cary, Renaissance Playwright" 602).² Henry Cary married a very young woman who was also his social

inferior; these factors likely served to accentuate her subordinate status. But Elizabeth was also an heiress, and as such a valuable commodity in the eyes of her future husband. It would seem that Henry secured in his new wife all that he could desire: a wealthy young woman of lower birth than himself who believed firmly in wifely obedience, and whose money, upon their marriage, became his own.³ According to her biographer, Elizabeth strove to live as an ideal Renaissance wife: Henry not only took control of her money, but "where his interest was concerned, she seemed not able to have any consideration of her own" (194). She endeavored to please him in all things: though she feared horses, she rode at his request; she dressed well, "because he would have it so," although "dressing was all her life a torture to her" (194). She taught her children to love their father "better than herself" (193).

We also learn from her biographer, however, that Cary possessed a "strong will;" it could not have been easy for her to learn to obey her "very absolute" husband (194), to mold her thoughts and behavior in accordance with his desires. As Elaine Beilin writes, "even after her marriage, Cary still sought free scope for her intellect and actions" ("Elizabeth Cary and *The Tragedie of Mariam*" 51). Indeed, her extensive reading would ultimately lead to the failure of her fervent efforts to live as a proper Protestant wife: in 1625, twenty-three years into her marriage, Cary finally underwent a formal conversion to Catholicism.⁴ This act effectively ended her marriage; the couple separated permanently. Henry cut off her allowance, reducing her to near penury, and removed all of her children from her care, leaving her alone with one servant. Throughout her marriage, Cary was loath to disobey her husband, but the struggle to preserve an appropriate wifely silence at last became too great.

Such inner conflict was the fate of the Renaissance wife. We have seen that the ideology of companionate marriage stressed a greater parity between husband and wife, though the suggestion was largely spurious. More broadly, the Protestant Reformation as a whole occasioned certain other (ostensible) advances for women. Protestant thought emphasized the importance of the individual conscience, a principle which "fostered in women the habit of building a sense of self in relation to God" (Kusunoki 188). At the same time, however, women were instructed in the art of self-erasure. Similarly, for upper class women like Cary, access to education became more prevalent, but could be put only to limited use. Sandra K. Fischer elaborates on this difficulty:

As a child Cary was both encouraged and dissuaded from learning; she could privately stretch her accomplishments to the limits of her potential but then must publicly conceal the extent of her "unladylike" abilities. One is reminded of the wide-ranging humanistic education of the daughters of Thomas More, and the paradox of these talents being put to use only as dinner entertainment for household guests. ("Elizabeth Cary and Tyranny, Domestic and Religious" 228-29)

Betty S. Travitsky has described the Renaissance woman's position as an "ambiguous reality" ("The *Feme Covert* in Elizabeth Cary's *Mariam*" 184); Cary's own struggle to come to terms with her burgeoning Catholicism while living according to Protestant marriage doctrine is a measure of both her extensive reading and the persistent tug of her own conscience. Bearing in mind the prevalence of such ambiguity in the period, we might view women's questioning of patriarchal commonplaces as integral to, rather than separate from, their experience as Renaissance wives.

Such questioning arises, of course, throughout Cary's *Mariam*, and yet, partly for this very reason, I believe we may still describe the play as representative of contemporary marriage theory. Travitsky observes that the play, likely written in 1602,

the year of Cary's marriage, "provides fascinating and explicit instances of both wifely rebellion and irresolute wifely smoldering . . . it is significant for the light it sheds on the experience of marriage of Renaissance women" (187). Representation does not preclude dissent; Cary portrays marriage in *Mariam* through female characters who, like their author, are embroiled in the ideals of an utterly internalized notion of love-marriage, yet still feel compelled to examine their inner selves.⁵

The rumor of Herod's death, which initiates the action at the beginning of *Mariam*, precipitates a flurry of rebellious activity. *Mariam* experiences a spark of joy, although a guilt-ridden one, at the idea of Herod's demise; Pheroras gleefully plans his marriage to a servant-girl; Salome plots to divorce her second husband in order to take a third. Herod's absence creates a dramatic space with marked similarities to that of Renaissance comedy: we enter a world inverted, where characters engage in culturally proscribed behavior (a "topsy-turvèd" world, according to Constabarus [1.6.424]). As Bakhtin explains, such a carnival period "celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions" (*Rabelais and His World* 10).

During their brief carnival period, *Mariam*'s characters act to undermine patriarchy; indeed, this is to be a world governed by women. Alexandra says to her daughter:

Let us retire us, that we may resolve
How now to deal in this reversèd state:
Great are th'affairs that we must now revolve,
And great affairs must not be taken late. (1.2.203-05)

For several of the play's characters, this new world opens a space for self-contemplation; specifically, they consider their marital situations. *Mariam*, Pheroras, and Salome all

attempt an assertion of individual will on the subject of marriage which appears to work against standard patriarchal precepts; they engage in "a special type of communication impossible in everyday life" (Bakhtin 10). They express themselves, giving voice to their desires. Yet they discover all too soon that Herod's death is no more than a myth; his return in Act 4 also constitutes the return of normative power, much like the reestablishment of convention at the close of a Shakespearean comedy. In its very structure, *Mariam* echoes the ubiquitous nature of patriarchal control. Herod was temporarily absent, not dead; similarly, the other characters' self-exploration prior to his return never really took place outside a patriarchal frame of reference. The play voices subversion only to contain it; we shall find that in *Merchant*, by contrast, the revival of custom is left fractured and incomplete.

Mariam's opening soliloquy expresses a tentative pleasure at the thought of Herod's death. She recalls that, upon hearing the news, she "wept indeed, when on his worth you thought,/ But joy'd that slaughter did your foe destroy" (1.1.11-12). Her hatred for Herod as murderer of her relatives nearly subsumes her love for him as her husband. Indeed, the soliloquy is itself a representation of Mariam's fatal tendency to give voice to her own thoughts. The speech opens with her self-condemning statement, "How oft have I with public voice run on" (1.1.1), and the issue of female voice resonates throughout the play. As the drama continues, we learn we are to label as promiscuous women who speak to anyone other than their husbands. Constabarus, for example, chides his wife, Salome, for conversing with Silleus:

Oh Salome, how much you wrong your name,
Your race, your country, and your husband most!
A stranger's private conference is shame,
I blush for you, that have your blushing lost. (1.6.375-78)

Looseness of voice denotes looseness of body, and an unchaste woman is a worthless possession. Even Mariam's friend Sohemus notes that "unbridled speech is Mariam's worst disgrace" (3.4.183). Mariam must be ever aware of her reputation, since her public courtly life leaves her even more open to disgrace than other women. Ann Rosalind Jones, in her discussion of sixteenth- and early-seventeenth-century conduct books and marriage manuals, explains that the courtly sphere was a dangerous space for women: "threatened with the constant possibility of scandal, the court lady is advised to defend herself through a calculated rhetoric of words and gestures" ("Nets and Bridles" 43). Reckless, unruly speech will be Mariam's undoing.

Mariam herself is quick to recognize her fault both in hating her husband and in expressing that hatred. She rather abruptly evokes the lesson of companionate marriage:

Oft have I wish'd that I from him were free:
 Oft have I wish'd that he might lose his breath,
 Oft have I wish'd his carcass dead to see. . . .
 And blame me not, for Herod's jealousy
 Had power even constancy itself to change:
 For he, by barring me from liberty,
 To shun my ranging, taught me first to range.
 But yet too chaste a scholar was my heart,
 To learn to love another than my lord:
 To leave his love, my lesson's former part,
 I quickly learn'd, the other I abhorr'd.
 But now his death to memory doth call
 The tender love that he to Mariam bare:
 And mine to him; this makes those rivers fall,
 Which by another thought unmoisten'd are. (1.1.16-34)

Mariam, free to explore her inner self now that Herod is gone, gives voice to a well-merited hatred, then immediately berates herself: "How canst thou then so faintly now lament/ Thy truest lover's death, a death's disgrace: Ay, now, mine eyes, you do begin to

right/ The wrongs of your admirer and my lord" (1.1.65-68). Evidently, Mariam's 'self' largely comprises appropriate wifely love. Raber explains further:

Mariam's soliloquy reflects on a struggle for possession of self, a struggle in which she can only partially resist Herod's dictation of the self she should have. But because her speeches repeatedly degenerate into self-recrimination, it becomes clear that Mariam's self depends upon the internalization of the very patterns she tries to overcome by projecting onto her husband: she continues to value chastity, constancy, even love. Mariam has two "teachers," her self and her husband, who compete for dominion, but only succeed in making the interior space she seeks to defend uninhabitable. . . . Without Herod, Mariam has neither husband nor monarch, a fact which relegates her "self" to an abyss where meaningful identity disappears. (330-31)

Mariam does attempt to unveil her individual self, but can reach no definition that does not entail her position and duty as a married woman. She clings to the notion that this violent, even murderous man is yet her "truest lover." As Beilin states, Mariam "[identifies] herself primarily as a woman in love" (55).

Mariam's speech indicates that her love for Herod is little more than a function of her internalized requisite identity as a wife. Not until Herod returns, however, do we receive genuine insight into the "tender love" he ostensibly feels for Mariam. Fischer notes that Herod's "only redeeming quality is his love for her, and it is excessive, possessive, and uxorious" (235-36); Tina Krontiris agrees that "he does not love Mariam for *her* but for *himself*" (*Oppositional Voices* 86). Mariam's status as property becomes shockingly clear in the midst of Herod's lamentations following her death:

I had but one inestimable jewel,
Yet one I had no monarch had the like . . .
I gaz'd thereon and never thought me bless'd,
But when on it my dazzl'd eye might rest,
A precious mirror made by wondrous art,
I priz'd it ten times dearer than my crown,
And laid it fast folded in my heart:
Yet I in sudden choler cast it down,

And pash'd it all to pieces: 'twas no foe
That robb'd me of it . . . (5.1.119-130)

Mariam, also known as "it," bears enormous monetary value: she is worth ten times more than Herod's crown; she is dazzling, inestimable, a work of art so costly that Herod might reasonably have feared being "robb'd" of her by an enemy. Herod recognizes himself as thief of his own possession; but truly, he has stolen Mariam from herself, first in marriage, finally in murder. Interestingly, he describes her as a "precious mirror," echoing the humanist ideal of wifely self-erasure (as depicted by Erasmus and discussed in Chapter 1) and affirming that, even in life, Mariam knew no sense of self beyond marriage. Herod has "laid fast folded" in his heart not a woman, but a prize: he makes no distinction between love and ownership. As he tells his sister, "A world cannot another Mariam buy" (4.7.467).

Despite her great value, Herod is forced to dispatch his property when he finds his control of Mariam becoming ever more tenuous. Mariam, unable to ignore her conscience in the matter of her relatives' murders, foregoes Herod's bed and refuses to "frame disguise" (4.3.145) when he commands her to smile. Here Mariam experiences the same conflict we observe in Elizabeth Cary's life: her individual conscience collides with her wifely duty to obey. For Mariam, the problem of conscience is compounded by her royal status; Barbara Kiefer Lewalski observes that "the high-born Mariam (whose family are the legitimate kings and priests of Israel) has some right to exhibit family pride and self-regard" ("Resisting Tyrants" 207). Mariam mocks both Salome and Herod in her scathing attack on their low birth: "Though I thy brother's face had never seen,/ My birth thy baser birth so far excell'd,/ I had to both of you the princess been" (1.3.232-34). The play makes the point that had Mariam been of lesser birth than her husband, their

marriage would have been more peaceable, and Mariam would not have met an early death. When, in an effort to regain her favors, Herod offers to crown her "empress of Arabia" (4.3.103) and to "give thee wealth, if thou for wealth do care" (106), Mariam replies, "I neither have of power nor riches want,/ I have enough, nor do I wish for more" (109-10). Evidently she would have been wiser to accept his gifts, to stroke his ego rather than her own. She preaches this lesson to herself just before her death: "Had I but with humility been grac'd,/ As well as fair I might have prov'd me wise" (4.8.559-60). Cary portrays a nonconformist aspect of Mariam's character—disobedience buttressed by status and wealth—but then resubsumes her behavior into the pattern of companionate marriage.

Cary depicts an alternative to the turbulent relationship between Herod and Mariam in the marriage of Pheroras, Herod's brother, and Graphina, a servant. As Act 2 opens, we find Pheroras giddily planning his wedding to a woman his brother would have forbidden him to marry:

How oft have I with lifted hands implor'd
This blessed hour, till now implor'd in vain,
Which hath my wished liberty restor'd,
And made my subject self my own again. (2.1.5-8)

Had Herod lived, "his power, and not my choice" (19) would have constrained Pheroras to marry his niece, "a princess born" (22). Believing him dead, however, Pheroras feels free to explore his options, to reclaim his "subject self." He intends to break with custom, to defy the king, in order to marry his true love. He has no interest in marriage based on considerations of lineage or status: "Near blood's without respect: high birth a toy,/ Since love can teach [us] blood and kindred's scorn" (23-24). Pheroras champions the ideology of love-marriage.

Yet love-marriage, we have seen, was grounded in and maintained by the principle of male dominance, and Pheroras in fact remains complicit in Herod's tyrannical patriarchy in spite of himself. He believes that 'love' operates above and beyond questions of status or class; however, we soon discover that he loves Graphina not despite her inferior status, but because of it. In response to his command to "move thy tongue" (41), Graphina says, "I have admired your affection long:/ And cannot yet therein a reason find./ Your hand hath lifted me from lowest state,/ To highest eminency wondrous grace . . ." (55-58). She concludes with a promise of "steadfast love/ And fast obedience" (70-71). Pheroras assures her that he "desire[s] no greater recompense" (74); his 'love' is contingent on her self-effacement, dependency, and obedience. These particular wifely qualities, which, the play implies, come naturally to one of lowly status, will make for a happy marriage.

Graphina and Pheroras represent the possibility of wedded life in its most ideal form; Cary herself invented Graphina's name and character, suggesting her desire to add an ideal wife to this tale of troubled marriages.⁶ Yet such a relationship, although lovely in theory, must have seemed a touch too perfect and innocuous to the often doubtful and conflicted Cary. Herod's sister Salome, to whom Cary gives what must be considered the most striking and forceful lines of the play, operates at the other end of the spectrum, bluntly interrogating the married woman's subordinate position. She desires a divorce from her husband Constabarus, demanding, "Why should such privilege to man be given?/ Or given to them, why barr'd from women then?" (1.4.305-06), and declaring that she will "be the custom-breaker: and begin/ To show my sex the way to freedom's

door" (309-10). Like Mariam and Pheroras, Salome attempts an exploration of self in Herod's absence:

Had I upon my reputation stood,
Had I affected an unspotted life,
Josephus' veins had still been stuff'd with blood,
And I to him had liv'd a sober wife. . . .
But shame is gone, and honour wip'd away,
And Impudency on my forehead sits:
She bids me work my will without delay,
And for my will I will employ my wits.
He loves, I love; what then can be the cause
Keeps me [from] being the Arabian's wife? (285-98)

Salome decides that shame and honour are mere "childish lets" (281); having disposed of these inflexible, male-defined boundaries, what Raber terms "superficial layers of behavior" (335), she may discover herself as simply a woman in love. In Constabarus' words, it is "Silleus' love that makes [her] thus/ Reverse all order" (1.6.457-58).

Constabarus' lecture to Salome on the subject of her "private conference" (1.6.377) with a man other than her husband indicates the code of behavior prescribed for a wife, with which Salome has failed to comply:

I love thee more than thou thyself dost know.
Oft with a silent sorrow have I heard
How ill Judea's mouth doth censure thee
Didst thou but know the worth of honest fame,
How much a virtuous woman is esteem'd,
Thou wouldest like hell eschew deserved shame,
And seek to be both chaste and chastely deem'd.
Our wisest prince did say, and true he said,
A virtuous woman crowns her husband's head. (1.6.386-96)

Constabarus' grief stems from the fact that his wife has not fulfilled the conditions of his love: she is unchaste and unruly. Salome herself describes the striking reversal of power in their relationship when she answers his rebuke:

Did I for this uprear thy low estate?

Did I for this requital beg thy life,
That thou hadst forfeited to hapless fate,
To be to such a thankless wretch the wife?
This hand of mine hath lifted up thy head,
Which many a day ago had fall'n full low,
Because the sons of Babas are not dead;
To me thou dost both life and fortune owe. (397-404)

In their edition of *Mariam*, Barry Weller and Margaret W. Ferguson explain that Salome once interceded on Constabarus' behalf when Herod learned of his attempt to usurp the kingdom. Salome recalls this favor in order to debase her husband, adding to it a threat to reveal his protection of Babas' sons. She constructs him as indebted to her; indeed, she goes so far as to inform him, "If once I lov'd you, greater is your debt:/ For certain 'tis that you deserved it not" (465-66). Her application of the word "debt" to her husband overturns its function elsewhere in the play, where it describes a wife's duty to love (sexually and otherwise) her husband; in her opening soliloquy *Mariam* says of her husband, "Hate hid his true affection from my sight,/ And kept my heart from paying him his debt" (1.1.21-22). Salome's self-positioning as the head of the marriage is precisely what is wrong with the relationship; if she loved him, she would "dismiss this mood" (1.6.409).⁷

Salome exhibits considerable power both within her marriage to Constabarus and in choosing to leave it. But we should remember that she is no longer in love with her current husband, making disobedience easy and natural. There seems no reason to believe that Salome's new feelings of love, even though they blossom at the expense of propriety, will grant her any measure of freedom in her next marriage; Cary releases her from traditional companionate marriage only with the concurrent promise of a speedy

return. While Salome revels in the control she wields in her relationship with Constabarus, she is quite prepared to give up everything for Silleus:

'Tis not for glory I thy love accept,
Judea yields me honours worthy store:
Had not affection in my bosom crept,
My native country should my life deplore.
Were not Silleus he with whom I go,
I would not change my Palestine for Rome:
Much less would I a glorious state to show
Go far to purchase an Arabian tomb. (1.5.357-64)

Content with her present position in life, Salome will only alter her circumstances if love requires that she do so. Silleus' offer to Salome that she "shalt command as much/ As if the royal ornament were thine" prefigures Herod's offer to crown Mariam "empress of Arabia" in Act 4; while Mariam rejects Herod's largesse because she requires no further power, Salome suggests that she will forego all power in favor of love.

Cary gives Salome plenty of room to voice her dissenting opinions; in doing so Cary undertakes an important examination of the difficulties and injustices women experience in marriage. Salome broaches the vastly important issue of women's access to divorce, and by extension demands a more egalitarian power structure in general. This character, who will not be silenced, gives a sense of Cary's concern for women who do not fit the highly structured and idealized form of Renaissance wife, and for the genuine problems they face as subordinate members of society. Readers of *Mariam* often note that the villainous Salome remains alive at the end, all her desires intact; they feel that this fact speaks to Cary's privileging of this character, and perhaps it does. Yet while the play's end does not see Salome's death, neither does it see her marriage; it seems that Cary built into her play a method for Salome's rebellious voice, however resolutely expressed, to be ultimately resubsumed into companionate marriage. Just as Shakespeare

does in *Merchant*, Cary returns her characters to conventional behavior patterns following their defiance. Unlike *Merchant*, however, this play leaves no unsettling loose ends: female subversion is, in the last instance, contained.

That the notion of companionship and mutuality in marriage was largely illusory becomes particularly clear near the end of the play, when Constabarus, on his way with the sons of Babas to be executed, launches into his tirade against women. During this rant, Constabarus establishes the inherent reciprocity of male friendship:

Babas' First Son. With willing mind I could myself resign,
But yet it grieves me with a grief untold:
Our death should be accompani'd with thine,
Our friendship we to thee have dearly sold.
Constabarus. Still wilt thou wrong the sacred name of friend?
Then should'st thou never style it friendship more:
But base mechanic traffic that doth lend,
Yet will be sure they shall the debt restore. (4.6.283-90)

Constabarus expresses outrage at the very idea of conflating love for a human with issues of commerce or debt; as we learned from Alan Bray in Chapter 1, money was (ideally) a stranger to the male-male relationship. Yet of course this very conflation, as we have seen, is at the heart of male-female relationships within companionate marriage.

Constabarus concludes his "censure" of women with the assertion, "Your loves are set on nothing but your will" (347). While close bonds between men should, at least in theory, stem from no other motive than mutual affection, the marriage bond carries with it a whole set of obligations and conditions, mostly for women. In contrasting these two types of relations, Constabarus underscores the disproportionate power structure so fundamental to companionate marriage.

The Tragedy of Mariam provides fascinating insight into the world of the married Renaissance woman, illustrating both her acceptance of prevailing marriage doctrine and

her questioning of the same. Yet in stressing the importance of 'love' and all its attendant requirements for wives, the play ultimately overturns the dissenting female voice. We learn precisely what constitutes 'love': the act of female subordination to male power, no matter how inflated or even crazed. Boyd M. Berry writes that the drama is "infected . . . by the lunacy of Herod—at times laughable as well as monstrous" ("Feminine Construction of Patriarchy" 265). Berry goes on to note that this lunacy "insists on 'love' rather than lineage or 'kindred' as the basis of marriage . . ." (265). To be sure, Herod is lunatic by the play's end, but his lunacy reigns supreme. His absurd behavior in the fourth act may easily be viewed as comic. But the tragedy of this drama is located in that same behavior, for Herod rules this world, just as the men in it rule their wives. Most tragic of all is Cary's own insistence that a woman love her husband, even when to love ultimately means to lose all she has—her property, her self, her very life.

NOTES

¹ Modern scholars are fortunate to have such a valuable resource as this lengthy biography of Cary, written by one of her daughters sometime between 1643 and 1650. It was first edited and published in 1861 by Richard Simpson as *The Lady Falkland: Her Life*. As Barry Weller and Margaret W. Ferguson point out in their edition of *Mariam* and the *Life*, it is thanks to this biography that we know more about Cary's life than we do about Shakespeare's. They caution, however, that "many facts remain obscure, and some aspects of Cary's literary career are simply not mentioned in the *Life*. Even the information it does present cannot always be taken at face value, for the author has both filial and theological investments in the representation of her mother" (2). Weller and Ferguson retain in brackets substantive manuscript erasures; Simpson made deletions which ostensibly followed those made by Patrick Cary (Elizabeth's son) on the grounds that some passages were 'too feminine.' However, our editors observe that Patrick's responsibility for these changes is not "self-evident" (51).

² Lawrence Tanfield was a wealthy Oxford lawyer; later, following his daughter's alliance with the Carys, he became Sir Lawrence and Lord Chief Baron of the Exchequer. Henry Cary was a knight's son; after his marriage to Elizabeth he spent his life as a professional courtier and eventually received a seat on the Privy Council, the rank of viscount, and the Lord Chief Deputyship of Ireland (Pearse 602).

³ That the marriage served to commodify Elizabeth is made clear not only by the fact that Henry married her solely for her money: in 1622 he forced her to mortgage her jointure properties to raise the necessary funds for his appointment as Lord Deputy in Ireland, resulting in Elizabeth's father disinheriting her and leaving his fortune and estates to his grandson Lucius (*The Lady Falkland: Her Life* 194-95).

⁴ Cary's biographer suggests that her mother's reading (of Hooker in particular) led her to question her Protestant faith when she was about twenty years old. However, given that her conversion and ultimate defiance of her husband did not take place for at least another twenty years, we must assume that Cary struggled to uphold Protestant marriage values during the interim. Naomi J. Miller stresses the need to "situate her voice as an author in relation not only to subsequent conflicts with her husband, but also to the

domestic politics which marked both her upper-class upbringing and her rearing of her own children"

("Domestic Politics in Elizabeth Cary's *The Tragedy of Mariam* 354).

⁵ Written later in the seventeenth century, Margaret Cavendish's plays often depict female characters still coping with the reality of mercenary marriage as it conflicted with love-marriage. *Bell in Campo* (1662) features three gentlemen, Monsieur Comerade, Monsieur Compagnion, and Monsieur la Gravity, all pursuing "Rich Widows" whose husbands "are not yet laid in their Graves" (136). The foolish Lady Passionate quickly marries Compagnion, and immediately finds that

all my Servants slight and neglect me, following those that command the purse, for this idle young fellow which I have married first seized on all my goods, then let Leases for many lives out of my Lands, for which he had great fines, and now he cuts down all my Woods, and sells all my Lands of Inheritance, which I foolishly and fondly delivered by deed of gift, the first day I married, divesting my self of all power, which power had I kept in my own hands I might have been used better . . . (162)

⁶ Weller and Ferguson note that Graphina's name "may be intended to evoke writing (*graphesis* in Greek) as a 'silent' form of speech" (*The Tragedy of Mariam* 160 n18). Unlike Mariam, Graphina is able to preserve an appropriate, ideal wifely silence, unless Pheroras specifically directs her to speak.

⁷ Tina Krontiris would agree that Constabarus wins the debate on women's role in society. She feels that Constabarus is a "credible and sympathetic" character; she observes that "we, from a twentieth-century point of view, can see that the play's women are victims of a society which denies them their rights and pits one against the other But it is not at all clear that the author sees the women of her play in the same light. She is sympathetic towards her male characters" (*Oppositional Voices* 88).

Chapter Three



Portia's Marriage: The Reclaimed Female Self in Shakespeare's Merchant

Are we then bound to be the Flatterers of Time or the dependents on Custom? Oh miserable servitude, chained only to Baseness and Folly, for than custom, nothing is more absurd, nothing more foolish.

Haec Vir

As we turn from *Mariam* to *The Merchant of Venice*, the tragic losses so fundamental to Renaissance woman's experience in marriage begin to fade from memory. *Merchant's* world is one governed by a woman of astonishing power and authority, a woman who does not succumb to the constructed self her society would have her accept. True, Portia marries, and hands over "this house, these servants, and this same myself" (3.2.170) to her lord, Bassanio. We cannot, however, view Portia's words as a genuine divestiture of her power and personal property, for moments later she learns of Antonio's predicament, and immediately commences flinging money brazenly about: "What, no more?/ Pay him six thousand, and deface the bond./ Double six thousand and then treble that You shall have gold/ To pay the petty debt twenty times over . . ." (3.2.298-307). Portia staunchly locates power in money, and at no point in the drama does Shakespeare disabuse his female hero of her conviction. Her marriage will not adhere to the ideology of companionate marriage as represented by Cary's *Mariam*, for

Portia will not relinquish her money, will not keep silent, and will not stay at home. Most important, her subversive behavior, unlike Mariam's, will not be wholly contained when the play ends. Portia reconfigures her culture's notion of a woman 'in love,' since her love for Bassanio does not entail the usual feminine self-effacement, but coexists with female power and voice.

Portia's self-reclamation from the confines of companionate marriage ideology and traditional gender roles seems all the more impressive when considered within the context of the male homosocial bond, an alliance between men which, by commodifying women, operates to their exclusion. As we found in our discussion of *Mariam* and in Chapter 1, women in early modern England existed primarily as male-owned chattels: this economic ideology obscured the distinction between money and the female body. Yet Shakespeare does not constrain Portia to function merely as an object of exchange between men. She resists male attempts to commodify her; unlike the play's men, she recognizes the difference between her self and her money. Indeed, the male characters' consistent failure to distinguish between money and their *own* gender at once accentuates and reverses the prevailing view of woman as commodity, allowing Portia to propose a new ideology of marriage, one in which a woman may marry and yet retain a powerful, authoritative self.

Money permeates nearly every relationship in *The Merchant of Venice*; as Lars Engle writes, in this play "bills and love letters are unusually difficult to distinguish" ("Thrift is Blessing" 20). Indeed, the play's action originates in Bassanio's fortune-hunting: as *Merchant* opens we learn that he has "disabled mine estate/ By something showing a more swelling port/ Than my faint means would grant continuance" (1.1.123-

25). Bassanio has decided on a quick fix for his financial woes: he will marry a wealthy wife in order to cancel his debts and recover his affluence. The play thus establishes the conflation between money and love very early on: Bassanio will pursue a "lady richly left" (1.1.161) for a marriage partner. He relies for financial relief on the prosperity of a woman he 'loves,' but in order to procure her money he must similarly rely on the prosperity of a dear male friend. Because Antonio must in turn look to Shylock for a loan, relations among all of these people, however loving they may be, become contingent on usury.

Bassanio's money problems fit an economic pattern common in Shakespeare's day. The breakup of feudalism had left the aristocracy floundering financially, but still trying to maintain expensive tastes; we watch as the bankrupt Bassanio hires a new servant, Launcelot Gobbo, and orders for him a livery "more guarded (decorated with braid) than his fellows" (2.2.143). Stephen A. Cohen explains that the aristocracy "had been unable to adapt their financial practice to the new economy and were consequently forced into an increasingly parasitic relationship to that economy" ("The Quality of Mercy" 40); men like Bassanio were thus easy prey for usurers like Shylock.¹ Antonio rails against usury from the outset: "If thou wilt lend this money," he tells Shylock, "lend it not/ As to thy friends—for when did friendship take/ A breed for barren metal of his friend? But lend it rather to thine enemy . . ." (1.3.128-31). Michael Ferber notes that Antonio here invokes the Christian understanding of Deuteronomy 23:19-20: "Unto a stranger thou mayest lend upon usury; but unto thy brother thou shalt not lend upon usury" ("The Ideology of *The Merchant of Venice*" 442); we may also recall Constabarus' horror in *Mariam* when his close friend fails to sever friendship from debt:

"Still wilt thou wrong the sacred name of friend?" (4.6.287). Friendship in *Merchant* comprises what Ferber has identified as an "ideology of risk": "In the general scheme of the play, Antonio, Bassanio, and Portia stand for generosity, self-sacrifice, risk, and love, while Shylock stands for miserliness, sacrifice of others, certainty (or surety), and hatred" (446). A Christian moneylender does not charge his friends interest, even when, like the frivolous Bassanio, "that which [they] owe is lost" (1.2.147).

Yet the dichotomy Ferber describes is more deceptive than illuminating, since the Christian characters in fact prove exceptionally inept at distinguishing between people and money. Marc Shell observes that the exchange of persons for money is a peculiarly Christian tradition; he discusses the institution of wergeld (literally 'man money') and points out that it is not Jewish:

In Jewish law there is no commensuration between human life and money. . . . Christian jurisprudence, unlike Jewish, does make life and money commensurable. According to law codes in medieval Christendom, a murderer could pay for his crime with wergeld, or blood money. The symptomatic association—indeed, conceptual interchangeability—of person and purse, which such extreme cases as the one presented in *The Merchant of Venice* help to reveal, is typical of Christian feudal and capitalist states in general. ("The Wether and the Ewe" 64-65)

When Shakespeare imposes Christian ideology on the Jewish Shylock through Shylock's instigation of the sensational pound of flesh scenario, we nearly forget that the people/money conflation also plays out again and again, albeit in more mundane ways, within the Christian crowd itself.² Among all of *Merchant's* men, money, love, and the physical body seem almost indistinguishable concepts, so tightly are they knit together. Engle argues that Salerio and Solanio, unable to decide if Antonio's sadness in Act 1 derives from love or economic strain, are "right on both counts" (21-22). Antonio fears the loss of Bassanio to a woman, and of his ships to the sea, but cannot describe these as discrete

occasions for despondency. He feels only a generalized sense of grief: "In sooth I know not why I am so sad./ It wearies me . . ." (1.1.1-2). A short while later, Antonio confirms this conflation of love and money by generously offering "my purse, my person, my extremest means" (1.1.138) to his "bosom lover" (3.4.17), Bassanio. Bassanio, for his part, observes that "To you, Antonio,/ I owe the most in money and in love" (1.1.130-31). The love they share has firm roots in their society's system of economic exchange: they are unable to relate to one another outside of an economic discourse.

Antonio and Bassanio's relationship exemplifies what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has described as a male 'homosocial' bond: they participate in a close relationship³ to the exclusion of women, with the aim of "preserving the continuity of an existing dominant culture" (*Between Men* 34). Such a bond rests on economics: we know that Antonio and Bassanio share an innately monetary bond which conflates their personal and financial relationships. More importantly, for my purposes, such a bond also rests on the conflation of women and finances; men retain their alliances with one another, and thus their powerful social positions, through their commodification of women. Antonio's sadness at the thought of losing his friend to a woman is alleviated when the two of them join forces to *buy* said woman; they strengthen their bond by repositioning her from active threat to passive commodity:

Her name is Portia, nothing undervalued
 To Cato's daughter, Brutus' Portia;
 Nor is the wide world ignorant of her worth,
 For the four winds blow in from every coast
 Renowned suitors, and her sunny locks
 Hang on her temples like a golden fleece,
 Which makes her seat of Belmont Colchos' strond,
 And many Jasons come in quest of her.
 O my Antonio, had I but the means
 To hold a rival place with one of them,

I have a mind presages me such thrift
That I should questionless be fortunate! (1.1.165-176)

As Bassanio reconfigures his male friendship to include a woman, Portia takes her place as "a lady richly left," and Antonio as "my Antonio," conflating the men's closeness with their treatment of women as commodities.⁴

The Antonio-Bassanio relationship, then, sets male-male love in opposition to marital love; their bond excludes Portia and renders her useless outside her role as an object of exchange. Keith Geary argues that Antonio presses the men-before-women principle by demonstrating an eagerness to sacrifice himself for Bassanio:

Therefore I do beseech you
Make no more offers, use no farther means,
But with all brief and plain expediency
Let me have judgment, and the Jew his will. (4.1.80-83)

Antonio, Geary explains, "sets his sacrifice and his love in explicit opposition to Portia's love for Bassanio" ("The Nature of Portia's Victory" 65); the bond with Shylock constitutes Antonio's "desperate attempt to hold on to Bassanio, to bind the young man to him" (63). Antonio specifically asks Bassanio to tell Portia the story of his death: "Say how I loved you, speak me fair in death;/ And when the tale is told, bid her be judge/ Whether Bassanio had not once a love" (4.1.273-75). Of course, Bassanio has a love in Portia, but this fact seems of little relevance to Antonio, or indeed to Bassanio himself, who promptly offers up Portia to save his friend: "But life itself, my wife, and all the world/ Are not with me esteemed above thy life" (4.1.282). Geary notes that Shakespeare's alterations to one of his sources, Giovanni Fiorentino's *Il Pecorone*, increase the clout of the Antonio character, making him an explicit threat to Portia's marriage: "Shakespeare makes his Antonio Bassanio's friend instead of his godfather,

thus importing into the story the love-versus-friendship *débat* in the first place" (60).

Coppélia Kahn suggests that the anxiety men feel about losing each other due to marriage

"constitutes a threat to the men's sense of themselves as men" ("The Cuckoo's Note"

106). We know that Antonio, sad at the thought of Bassanio's interest in a woman, has

"much ado to know myself" (1.1.7). Homosocial relations confirm the male sense of self

as they obliterate, for men, the very idea of a female self.

The homosocial relationship between Antonio and Bassanio takes a cooperative form: the two collaborate to buy Portia, resulting in her displacement. But men in Shakespeare also frequently engage in competitive relationships, with much the same result. Several of Shakespeare's sonnets provide compelling examples of what René Girard has termed 'mimetic desire'; that is, the phenomenon wherein competition between men provokes desire for a woman, while the woman herself functions, yet again, merely as an object of exchange between the two. Sonnet 42, with its portrayal of the sexual triangle,⁵ illustrates this concept:

That thou hast her, it is not all my grief,
And yet it may be said I loved her dearly;
That she hath thee is of my wailing chief,
A loss in love that touches me more nearly.
Loving offenders, thus I will excuse ye:
Thou dost love her because thou know'st I love her,
And for my sake even so doth she abuse me,
Suffring my friend for my sake to approve her.
If I lose thee, my loss is my love's gain,
And losing her, my friend hath found that loss:
Both find each other, and I lose both twain,
And both for my sake lay on me this cross.

But here's the joy: my friend and I are one;
Sweet flattery! then she loves but me alone.

Both men love the same woman, but the speaker clearly asserts the basis of that love:

"Thou dost love her because thou know'st I love her." The speaker displays a much

greater interest in the young man than in the woman herself. We recall Herod's words of regret following his execution of Mariam, which express a similarly competitive bent: "I had but one inestimable jewel,/ Yet one I had no monarch had the like . . ." (5.1.119-20). This male competitive relationship, Sedgwick suggests, ultimately consolidates the male bond and eradicates women from the *Sonnets*: "... marriage, name, family, loyalty to progenitors and to posterity, all depend on the youth's making a particular use of women that is not, in the abstract, seen as opposing, denying, or detracting from his bond to the speaker" (35).⁶ In other words, as Sonnet 42's speaker puts it, "my friend and I are one."

Another Shakespearean example, *The Rape of Lucrece*, similarly exhibits the principle of mimetic desire, but within a specifically economic context. *Lucrece* opens with Collatine's description of his wife as the "priceless wealth the heavens had him lent/ In the possession of his beauteous mate" (*The Rape of Lucrece* 17-18). Like Mariam, Lucrece is constructed as a "jewel;" as such she may be stolen, a temptation Tarquin cannot resist. Lucrece's rape, then, is an act of economic exchange, where her body becomes a piece of property stolen from one man by another. The image of the fortress early in the poem suggests Collatine's guardianship of Lucrece and her sexuality: "Honor and beauty, in the owner's arms/ Are weakly fortified from a world of harms" (27-8). He proves, however, an inept guardian; the narrator points to Collatine's fault in publicizing his property:

Or why is Collatine the publisher
Of that rich jewel he should keep unknown
From thievish ears, because it is his own? (33-35)

"Collatine," writes Girard, "does all he can do to contaminate his rival with desire" (*Theater of Envy* 22). If men are to be satisfied that they possess the richest, most

desirable objects, flattery alone will not suffice; "they need more tangible proof, the desire of other men, as numerous and prestigious as possible" (Girard 22).

Financial competition between men thus becomes the driving force behind the rape. Jealous that Collatine possesses such riches, Tarquin seeks to rob him. Indeed, far from using an impassioned rhetoric, Tarquin deliberately and logically informs Lucrece of his plan:

'Lucrece,' quoth he, 'this night I must enjoy thee.
If thou deny, then force must work my way;
For in thy bed I purpose to destroy thee.
That done, some worthless slave of thine I'll slay,
To kill thine honor with thy live's decay;
And in thy dead arms do I mean to place him,
Swearing I slew him, seeing thee embrace him. (512-18)

We may hardly consider lust his motivation. His definitive announcement, "Desire my pilot is, beauty my prize" (279), is immediately qualified in the next line when he terms beauty "treasure." Shakespeare's readers might also remember that unlike the Tarquins of *Lucrece's* Latin sources, both of whom become inflamed by Lucrece's beauty once they see her, Shakespeare's Tarquin embarks on his quest without so much as a glimpse at his target. "Collatine's rhetoric," writes Nancy Vickers, "not Lucrece's beauty, prompts Tarquin's departure" ("The Blazon of Sweet Beauty's Best" 100).

Vickers' article points to the use of 'blazon'⁷ in *Lucrece*; in the poem's Argument, Collatine blazons, or displays, his wife for the benefit of other men. The narrative, says Vickers, is therefore

set in motion by a descriptive occasion, by a competition between husbands each blazoning his wife. . . . The canonical legacy of description in praise of beauty is, after all, a legacy shaped predominantly by the male imagination for the male imagination; it is, in large part, the product of men talking to men about women. (96)

In blazoning his wife, Collatine crystallizes her position as a commodity; fragmenting her body into bits of property, he "unlock[s] the treasure of his happy state" (16). Patricia Parker, in *Literary Fat Ladies*, examines the link between property and rhetoric; following Vickers, she discusses the gendered nature of the blazon:⁸

The inventory or itemizing impulse of the blazon . . . would seem to be part of the motif of taking control of a woman's body by making it, precisely, the engaging "matter" of male discourse, a passive commodity in a homosocial discourse or male exchange in which the woman herself, traditionally absent, does not speak. (131)

Here we return to the figure of the silent woman: she is passive, commodified, subject to men—characteristics emphasized and sustained through use of the blazon.

Interestingly, however, the blazon in *Merchant* achieves precisely the opposite effect. In the first act, Shylock, never much troubled by the concept of people as money, sets out the terms of his agreement with Antonio:

If you repay me not on such a day
In such a place, such sum or sums as are
Expressed in the condition, let the forfeit
Be nominated for an equal pound
Of your fair flesh, to be cut off and taken
In what part of your body pleaseth me.⁹ (1.3.144-147)

In applying deliberate, legalistic language to the human body, Shylock's words echo Tarquin's declaration of his intent to rape Lucrece, but with a compelling twist. This time, a *man's* body is to be ravaged and treated as money. Antonio's body is blazoned: Shylock reduces him to physical parts—indeed he narrowly escapes a literal dissection—and during the trial scene we see his body on display. Portia informs Antonio, "Why then, thus it is:/ You must prepare your bosom for his knife" (4.1.242-23), and a few lines later instructs him to "lay bare your bosom" (250). The ever eager Shylock has scales at the ready to weigh Antonio's flesh; the others attempt to buy back the flesh at three times

the amount of the original debt. As his friends busy themselves trying to strike a deal over his body, Antonio remains largely silent: from Portia's entrance at line 164 to Shylock's defeat at line 334, Antonio speaks 22 lines, 18 of which are in response to Portia's "You, merchant, have you anything to say?" (261).¹⁰ Portia's quiet mastery here allows Antonio a limited voice which she controls; she renders absurd Shylock's earlier, ridiculously inflexible refusal to hear Antonio: "I'll have my bond. I will not hear thee speak./ I'll have my bond, and therefore speak no more. . . . I'll have no speaking; I will have my bond" (3.3.12-17).

Portia, in firm control of the trial scene, uses Shylock's desire for his bond to realize her own purpose; that is, to take control of Antonio's body. Shylock is excited about carving him up, but it is Portia who situates Antonio as a passive commodity. In attempting to buy his body back from Shylock, she makes him an object of exchange; in approving the bond she places him humiliatingly on display. He has himself become the figure of the silent woman: like *Mariam's* Graphina, who speaks only when Pheroras commands her to "move thy tongue" (2.1.41), Antonio is subject to Portia's rule. By applying it to a male body, Portia has restructured the traditional form of the blazon.

While Portia clearly has the upper hand throughout the trial scene and ultimately defeats Shylock, the scene also suggests an interesting alliance between the two; as Marianne L. Novy writes, "the play's outsiders by race and sex, [they] are paralleled as well as contrasted. . . . Unlike the other characters, she can establish a common language with him" (*Love's Argument* 64, 74). Both struggle against the attitudes of Christian men. Their alliance is made particularly clear when Shylock, reacting to Bassanio and Gratiano's wish to save Antonio through the speedy sacrifice of their wives, remarks

caustically, "These be the Christian husbands!" (4.1.293). We have seen that Portia and Shylock possess a similar desire to blazon and commodify Antonio—she to redefine her position in her marriage, he to achieve revenge. Shylock, who has a "habit of reducing everything to physical or 'worldly' terms" (Ferber 459), in fact blazons *himself* in his most famous speech:

Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions (bodily members), senses, affections, passions?—fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer as a Christian is? If you prick us, do we not bleed? If you tickle us, do we not laugh? If you poison us, do we not die? And if you wrong us, shall we not revenge? If we are like you in the rest, we will resemble you in that. . . . The villainy you teach me I will execute . . . (3.1.51-63)

Shylock reduces himself to his various physical parts and bodily responses, verbally inflicting on his own body the literal dissection he has in mind for Antonio. In so doing Shylock seems almost to mock the Christian men's tendency to fracture the self. He has learned a very particular villainy from them, and will indeed execute it, not only on Antonio, but on his daughter as well.

It is in his disturbing treatment of Jessica that we see the specific contrast between Shylock and Portia, for while she uses human commodification as a necessary tool, he seems to have internalized this "villainy." Conflating Jessica's theft of herself from him with her theft of his money, he repeatedly cries "My daughter! Oh my ducats! O my daughter!" in what Solanio describes as "a passion so confused" (2.8.16,13). Shylock, unable to conceive of his daughter as an entity separate from his money, is confused indeed, although no more so than Lorenzo's gang; they think it "strange, outrageous, and variable" (2.8.13) that the "dog Jew" (14) should worry more about his ducats than his

daughter, but raise no objections to Lorenzo's plan to "play the thieves for wives"

(2.5.23)

We find, then, that *Merchant's* men as a group are unable to distinguish either their own selves or the female self from economic concerns. As Geary writes, "Antonio, finally, applies the diction of finance to love more than any other character. He will literally pay Bassanio's debt with all his heart" (65). Portia turns this tendency to her own advantage: she constructs both Antonio and Bassanio as passive commodities; in doing so she extracts herself from *her* position as commodity, thus breaking the basis of the bond between them and reclaiming her power and identity. She shifts from an object of exchange to a player in the game; Geary notes that at the end of the play, Portia's "casual" announcement to Antonio that his argosies have survived "creates the impression that Portia is in some mysterious way responsible for their reappearance: she pays off the remaining debt and Antonio's final claim on Bassanio is removed" (67-68). Portia's marriage has triumphed over the homosocial bond: "in giving more than can be reciprocated, [she] short-circuits the system of exchange and the male bonds it creates, winning her husband away from the arms of Antonio" (Newman 26).

Portia seems to experience little difficulty in reversing the traditional practice of commodification when it comes to Antonio and the love he shares with Bassanio. But what of Bassanio himself? Portia's ability to reverse her husband's seizure of her and her property is considerably less obvious. We know that Bassanio's chief interest in Portia actually lies in her fortune; Portia tells her gentlewoman, "I will do anything, Nerissa, ere I will be married to a sponge" (1.2.90-91), yet ends up with the worst sponge of all. Even more troubling is her pre-marital speech to this sponge:

Myself and what is mine to you and yours
Is now converted. But now I was the lord
Of this fair mansion, master of my servants,
Queen o'er myself; and even now, but now,
This house, these servants, and this same myself
Are yours, my lord's. (3.2.166-171)

The lines depict a woman's losses in traditional marriage: Portia will lose her home, her property, her control over her servants, and her identity. Bassanio buys her, robbing her of herself. Her stress on the phrases "but now" and "even now," uttered three times in this speech, suggests her acute awareness of the power shift: she is perhaps amazed by the speed at which she moves from owner to property.

But this same speech of Portia's opens with a provocative statement: "You see me, Lord Bassanio, where I stand,/ Such as I am" (3.2.49-50). Though Portia ostensibly refers here to her desire for increased beauty and riches in order to please Bassanio, the lines really beg the question, 'Who is she?' It is almost impossible to conceive of Portia's divestiture of herself as genuine, for her subsequent actions dramatically undermine her words. Even in that very speech she hardly seems to agree with her own statements: for part of it she refers to herself in the third person, creating a distance between the woman she speaks of and the woman she is:

But the full sum of me
Is sum of something—which, to term in gross,
Is an unlessoned girl, unschooled, unpractised;
Happy in this, she is not yet so old
But she may learn; happier than this,
She is not bred so dull but she can learn;
Happiest of all, is that her gentle spirit
Commits itself to yours to be directed,
As from her lord, her governor, her king. (3.2.157-165)

Portia pays lip service to the patriarchy, an action which, genuine or not, is certainly demeaning. But her portrayal of this "unlessoned girl" so far misses its mark as a

description of herself as to be quite ridiculous: she is neither innocent child nor eager pupil, but director, teacher, and judge.

We first witness Portia's destabilization of her own words very soon after she speaks them, when she hears of Antonio's plight. She springs into action:

What, no more?
Pay him six thousand, and deface the bond.
Double six thousand and then treble that,
Before a friend of this description
Shall lose a hair through Bassanio's fault . . .
You shall have gold
To pay the petty debt twenty times over . . . (3.2.298-307)

A few moments prior to this speech she supposedly gave all her money and power to Bassanio, but nevertheless it is she who now solves his difficulty, protecting him with her money. Meanwhile, she continues to command her servants, though they purportedly now serve Bassanio.¹¹ In short, she retains control of her household and her money, despite marital convention. She even possesses enough financial control to "purchase" Antonio, and, by extension, Bassanio as well:

How little is the cost I have bestowed
In purchasing the semblance of my soul
From out the state of hellish cruelty! (3.4.19-21)

In paying off the debt owing on the purchase of herself, Portia reverses Bassanio's commodification of her, striking back with a "purchase" of her own.

Portia's authority in her relationship to Bassanio, then, is premised on her financial control. As Engle writes, Portia "reverses the current of cash that has flowed in her direction by sending Bassanio back to Venice with a tidal wave of ducats. . . . She can securely outbid Venice for Bassanio; and seems cheerful at the prospect of establishing good credit in her favor" (34). Portia, in what Engle calls "a wonderful bow

to the market" (34) reminds Bassanio that he is "dear bought" (as Shylock later insists on receiving his pound of flesh because it is "dearly bought" [4.1.100]), and follows him to Venice in order to protect her investment. For whose sake, we might well ask, does she truly wish herself "ten thousand times more rich" (3.2.154)?

While we cannot say what moved Shakespeare to create such a financially powerful female character, Portia's identity as an Italian woman does direct our attention to the early modern Venetian economic system. As Carol Leventen notes, "the evidence is incomplete, but it does suggest that privileged Venetian women attained and exercised far more financial independence and influence than was possible for women of similar status in England" ("Patrimony and Patriarchy in *The Merchant of Venice*" 64). Much of that evidence has been garnered by Stanley Chojnacki and is presented in his article "Patrician Women in Early Renaissance Venice."¹² Chojnacki explains that Italian women's authority to hold and bequeath property rendered them "an important influence on economic and social relations within the patriciate" (177). Chojnacki's evidence indicates that women living under Venetian law enjoyed considerable protection of their dowry rights, as well as their rights in general. "In Venice," he writes, "there were no restrictions on a married woman's use of property that she owned outright" (189).

Whether a woman acquired property before or during her marriage, her husband did not control that property; this right effectively circumvented female commodification under patriarchy. Chojnacki also discusses women's writing of wills, a practice which increased rapidly in the fifteenth century (perhaps due to the ever-present threat of plague): "the fact that they did so, taking pains to determine for themselves the destiny of their estates instead of letting the statutory regulations take effect, indicates that women

had a clear sense of their legal prerogatives and their economic significance" (197). Interestingly, women often received inheritances not only from men, but from their mothers or other female relatives; they in turn bequeathed their own assets to their mothers and daughters.

Lisa Jardine traces a similar pattern in sixteenth-century England, where, she says, inheritance of property and Land Law was one area of early modern society in which "apparently, although not actually, women had become frighteningly strong and independent" (*Still Harping On Daughters* 78). In order to avoid fracturing their estates, families successfully attempted to convert *tail male* (passage of land from eldest son to eldest son) to *tail general* (passage of land to the eldest child of either sex); female heirs "provided a solution to the dissipation of intact estates" (86). Jardine points to the irony implicit in this situation:

The prominent position occupied by female heirs . . . is in striking contrast to the ideology of modesty and dutiful submissiveness It was certainly not in the minds of lawyers and landowners preoccupied with patrilinear succession that their women might be involved as other than means to a patriarchal end. But it does turn out to be the case . . . that female nobles and gentry are obtrusive during the period in their importance as carriers of inheritance. (87)

It seems that even in England some degree of challenge was occurring to women's limited role in the economic sphere. Leventen suggests that Portia's claim to authority via economic power expresses cultural fears about "the double spectre of a woman asserting control of property and herself" (71); once she relinquishes her autonomy to Bassanio, such fears are neutralized. When she subsequently makes use of her money, it is only "to alleviate the unhappiness of other men, not her own unhappiness" (72). I find the opposite to be true: the financial freedom of the Italian woman and the new economic possibilities burgeoning for the Englishwoman combine in

Portia, who puts these features to use in improving her own situation as a married woman.

Portia, in retaining her authority in marriage, defies the conventional image of the woman 'in love' espoused by proponents of companionate marriage ideology. We recall that a woman in love with her husband would easily and willingly subjugate herself to him; she would erase herself, mirror him, and do so happily. Ideally, she would also bring little money or property to the marriage, for a lack of resources would humble her and ensure her submission and obedience. Clearly, none of these features describe Portia, yet she is persistently characterized as 'loving.' In her recent book on *Merchant*, Joan Ozark Holmer writes:

Disguise may be Portia's necessary method, but love, for both Bassanio and Antonio, is her motive. . . . She voices her understanding of true friendship, the binding of two friends by an equally shared spiritual love . . . In reality, Antonio has nothing to cause him anxiety about his relationship with Bassanio now that Bassanio has another love in his life, and this truth Antonio will need to discover for himself. Without the slightest trace of jealousy or competitive rivalry Portia proclaims how "little is the cost" (3.4.22-3) to her to save Antonio from "hellish cruelty" (3.4.21). (*The Merchant of Venice: Choice, Hazard and Consequence* 117)

Holmer conveniently overlooks Portia's use of the term "purchasing" in this last citation; we recall that Portia in fact "purchases" Antonio from "hellish cruelty." Holmer's term "save" deliberately erases Portia's economic power in this situation. In constructing her as merely loving, and in refusing to acknowledge the implications for Portia of the men's "friendship," Holmer's reading reduces this character to nothing more than a realization of the ideal early modern wife. Holmer seems blissfully ignorant of the true principles of companionate marriage; she explains that "Paul counsels husbands to love their wives as they do themselves (Eph 5.28-31) and thereby introduces an idea of genderless

discrimination that precludes husbands from treating wives as objects or possessions because no man loves his own self that way" (117-18). This questionable take on Renaissance marriage theory hardly describes what Portia must contend with in marrying Bassanio.

There are various instances in the play where Portia's behavior fails to agree with her 'loving' nature. She exhibits, for example, a veritable nastiness when describing her suitors. Of Falconbridge she says, "How oddly he is suited! I think he bought his doublet in Italy, his round hose in France, his bonnet in Germany, and his behavior everywhere" (1.2.68-70); she then complains that her German suitor is "little better than a beast" (82). She reveals her racial intolerance on hearing of the Prince of Morocco's approach: "If he have the condition of a saint and the complexion of a devil, I had rather he should shrive me than wive me" (120-22). Shell notes that Portia "does not consider inward characteristics as measures of Man or of the men who court her" (55).

Throughout the play, she demonstrates a certain complacency and smugness: she is well pleased with her wealth and her prowess in the legal arena. Such characteristics hardly describe a woman whose main concern is love. Portia, indeed, has other concerns, such as retaining an authoritative self. As Kahn writes, "in her merrily stinging put-downs of the suitors, wit and verbal force substitute for sexual force and prerogative—as they also do when she prompts Bassanio to choose the right casket, when she manipulates the letter of the law, and when she uses the ring to get the upper hand over her husband" (108).

Portia's ostensibly loving nature includes a putative concern with mercy. In my first chapter I discussed the early modern period's tendency to characterize women as innately gentle and merciful; Lillian S. Robinson, using Ariosto, Tasso, and Spenser, has

shown how these feminine characteristics were deemed necessary to the early modern state, which required balance and flexibility. Linda Woodbridge explains that the association of women with mercy was a Renaissance commonplace; men, conversely, were associated with justice. She points to this dichotomy in Shakespeare:

In two plays about justice and mercy, male characters—Shylock, Angelo—demand letter-of-the-law justice, while female characters—Portia, Isabella—argue that “earthly power doth . . . show likest God’s / When mercy seasons justice” (*Merchant of Venice*, 4.1.196-97) and that “the marshal’s truncheon, nor the judge’s robe, / Become them with one half so good a grace / As mercy does” (*Measure for Measure*, 2.2.61-63).

And yet Portia’s ruling at the trial belies this model. She preaches mercy, yet shows little inclination to bestow any on Shylock. Indeed, she upholds law and contract to the uttermost. When Bassanio tries to have the law revoked, Portia reprimands him:

It must not be. There is no power in Venice
Can alter a decree established.
‘Twill be recorded for a precedent
And many an error by the same example
Will rush into the state. It cannot be. (4.1.216-20)

“It is justice—law—not mercy that prevails under Portia’s direction at the trial,” writes Alice N. Benston. “Mercy must not function until after adjudication is made and justice is dispensed” (“Portia, the Law, and the Tripartite Structure of *The Merchant of Venice*” 174).¹³

Portia’s concern with law and contract is not limited to her function as a judge. She also enters into a marriage contract with Bassanio, who cannot be certain that he has really won her: “. . . stand I even so, / As doubtful whether what I see be true, / Until confirmed, signed, ratified by you” (3.2.146-48). She does just that. Having relinquished her self and her property, she seals the contract: “I give them with this ring, / Which when you part from, lose, or give away, / Let it presage the ruin of your love / And be my

vantage to exclaim on you" (171-74). Samuel Ajzenstat considers this "a deadly serious and . . . a very poignant threat: my sexual fidelity is conditional on yours" ("Contract in *The Merchant of Venice*" 270). Well might she make such a threat; as Benston points out, Bassanio "has shown a propensity to take contractual obligations lightly" (184). Portia is wary of him, and rightly so, as she discovers when he offers her life to save his friend, and then gives away her ring at this friend's urging. Portia's love clearly differs from that set out by companionate marriage theory: she will not be subject to her husband's whims and irresponsible behavior, but will ensure that he upholds the contract between husband and wife. Ajzenstat suggests that, as in life, love and contract cannot be divided in this play: *Merchant* evokes "the project of learning how to live torn by the struggle between the unconditional and the conditional" (268).

Portia, then, in demonstrating her commitment to the principles of law and contract, qualifies the nature of a woman's love, as she also offers a challenge to the traditional designation of mercy to women and justice to men. A later and intriguing example of this same challenge occurs in the early-seventeenth-century *Swetnam the Woman-hater Arraigned by Women* (c. 1618), a play which developed out of the Swetnam controversy, discussed in Chapter 1. The play depicts a young couple, Leonida and Lisandro, caught in a sexual transgression; their subsequent trial becomes a debate over the relative culpability of women and men. Lorenzo, son of Atticus, king of Sicily, disguises himself as an Amazon and defends women; Swetnam, here named Misogynos, defends men. A judgment is eventually issued in favor of men and Leonida is condemned to die, prompting Lorenzo and the queen to plot revenge on Misogynos. The

conventional justice/ mercy division emerges as a major theme among these characters.

Atticus considers mercy effeminate, as he demonstrates in describing his counsellor Iago:

Old Iago is a froward Lord,
Honest, but lenative, ore-swaid too much
With pittie against Iustice, that's not good:
Indeed it is not in a Counsellor.
And he has too much of a woman, otherwise
He might be Ruler of a Monarchie,
For policie and wisdom. (5.3.40-46)

Swetnam's author, however, challenges this division, "staging men who are not particularly just, women not especially merciful. . . . What [the women] want is justice: they arraign [Misogynos] in their own court. And Atticus, representing male justice, is himself unjust. . . . During the last act, [he] comes out of the closet as a tyrant" (Woodbridge 309, 311).

Swetnam, in overturning stereotypes and challenging prejudices, exposes the absurdity of custom. The playwright reinforces the idea that traditional sex roles are mere social constructions by including a cross-dressed man, Lorenzo. Woodbridge writes that "Lorenzo in female clothing is a figure neither of fun nor of disgrace. He is the all-sided human being, the union of male and female, which should be the goal of civilized humankind" (316). Custom alone dictates and sustains sexual stereotypes; the Renaissance cross-dresser was feared precisely because he or she revealed the fragility of sexual difference. As Jonathan Dollimore states, female cross-dressers in particular were well placed to "disrupt the scheme of (hetero)sexual difference" (*Radical Tragedy* xxxv), exactly as the cross-dressed Portia does in *Merchant*'s trial scene.

Complaints about women donning male attire likely began during the 1570s; George Gascoigne's satire *The Steel Glas* (1576) complains of female transvestism, but

dismisses it as eccentric fashion. The text expresses, in Mary Beth Rose's words, an "astonished despair of female modesty" (*The Expense of Spirit* 68). Minor concerns about modesty soon evolved into full-fledged alarm at the thought of the sexes becoming interchangeable. Rose quotes Phillip Stubbes, writing in 1583: "Our Apparell was given us as a signe distinctive to discern betwixt sex and sex, and therefore one to weare the Apparell of another sex is to . . . adulterate the veritie of his owne kinde. Wherefore these Women may not improperly be called *Hermaphroditi*, that is, Monsters of bothe kindes, half women, half men" (68). The intense anxiety about dress and the desire to uphold custom in this area reflected broader social concerns about cultural mutability: changes during the early modern period to economic and class systems, as well as the stirrings of independent thought among women, resulted in the patriarchal need to reiterate the importance of separate attire for the sexes. In 1620 an outraged King James protested against the disorder he saw arising from the phenomenon of women in men's clothing, and ordered London preachers to decry the practice in their sermons.

Also in 1620, a pair of pamphlets representing the conservative and liberal perspectives on the issue of female cross-dressing appeared. The anonymous author of *Hic Mulier; or, The Man-Woman* informs "masculine" women that they are "stranger than strangeness itself; whom Wise men wonder at, Boys shout at, and Goblins themselves start at" (266). This author resolutely believes in women's essential nature; once they have "cast off the ornaments of [their sex] to put on the garments of Shame" they become "all things but that which [they] should be" (266). *Hic Mulier* was answered seven days later by another anonymous essay, *Haec Vir; or, The Womanish Man*, which is constructed as a dialogue between *Hic Mulier* and *Haec Vir*. In places this

essay has a decidedly revolutionary feel to it, as when Hic Mulier declares, "We are as freeborn as Men, have as free election and as free spirits; we are compounded of like parts and may with like liberty make benefit of our Creations" (284). The essay ends rather disappointingly: Hic Mulier suggests that she only needs to dress as a man because men have ceased to fulfill their proper role in society. And yet, as Woodbridge stresses, "no writer since Agrippa—indeed, not even Agrippa himself—had so resoundingly repudiated custom" (148). Hic Mulier struggles to make sense of Haec Vir's censure, "for what we do wear is warm, thrifty, and wholesome. Then no excess, and so no indiscretion—where is then the error? Only in the fashion, only in the Custom. Oh, for mercy sake, bind us not to so hateful a companion . . ." (285). Hic Mulier's rejection of custom echoes Portia's assertion of an authoritative self—she will not be shaped according to male prerogative merely because women normally are.

Laura Levine's treatment of cross-dressing reveals the male fear of losing one's masculinity that underlies dictates to maintain customary gender divisions. In *Men in Women's Clothing*, Levine observes the relationship between the stage and the idea of a masculine self. In discussing Renaissance writers of anti-theatrical tracts, she demonstrates the common belief that theater, by clothing the male body in women's garments, 'effeminates' the mind. She writes, "At stake in the fear of effeminaization must be a basic doubt: 'What am I?'—as if one of the primitive, fundamental categories of knowledge for these tract writers were, 'What am I, man or woman?' (6). Thus the revelation scene in Jonson's *Epicoene* comes as a great relief, for

unlike the other scenes of theatre which effeminize, this one restores the idea of an essential male under the costume. In stripping Epicoene of his artifice and revealing him to be a boy, Dauphine reaffirms the idea of the 'real self,' restores the very idea of the real. In banishing the epicene,

Dauphine's final gesture reaffirms the premise the play began with, that all that was needed to get back to the essential male was to banish theatre, to take off the disguise . . . (Levine 85)

Sexual identity was an easily shaken construct, and therefore one which men evidently felt compelled to control.

While we might expect Shakespearean comedy, with its frequent examples of female cross-dressing, to pose a threat to masculine, patriarchal identity, this is not often the case. *Twelfth Night* exemplifies the recuperative tendencies of the comedies; Jean E. Howard notes that Viola's male attire "is in no way adopted to protest gender inequities or to prove that 'Custome is an idiot,' (*Haec Vir*)" but as "a practical means of survival in an alien environment" ("Crossdressing, The Theatre, and Gender Struggle in Early Modern England" 431).¹⁴ Indeed, Viola, ruminating on Olivia's deception, fears the outcome of her transgression:

I am the man. If it be so, as 'tis,
Poor lady, she were better love a dream.
Disguise, I see thou art a wickedness
Wherein the pregnant enemy does much. . . .
How will this fadge? My master loves her dearly
And I, (poor monster) fond as much on him;
And she (mistaken) seems to dote on me.
What will become of this? (2.2.25-35)

This "poor monster," man and woman both, becomes naturalized in marriage; as Howard says, "the whole thrust of the dramatic narrative is to release this woman from the prison of her masculine attire and return her to her proper and natural position as wife" (431).¹⁵ The play thus reaffirms accepted configurations of gender, posing little threat to the patriarchal understanding of sexuality.

As You Like It's Rosalind similarly sheds her male disguise and accepts the position of wife at the end of the play; moreover, even when dressed as a man, she retains

an appropriate femininity. She demands of Celia, "Dost thou think, though I am caparisoned like a man, I have a doublet and hose in my disposition?" (3.2.185-87). Yet the play also undermines the idea of gender roles as inborn. In acting out for Orlando male-fabricated notions of feminine behavior while dressed as a man—she will be "more clamorous than a parrot against rain, more newfangled than an ape, more giddy in my desires than a monkey" (4.1.137-39)—Rosalind exposes such behavior as a mere social construction. Similarly, Rosalind's reminder to the audience in her epilogue that 'she' is really a boy *playing* a woman destabilizes the entire concept of sexual difference.

It is this destabilizing influence that aligns Rosalind with Portia; for in demonstrating that women can successfully assume authority, Portia reveals that "masculine prerogatives are based on custom, not nature" (Howard 433). Yet unlike Rosalind and Viola, Portia uses male attire as considerably more than a disguise. Indeed, Geary argues that she adopts a "wholly masculine" identity; the dramatic irony Shakespeare uses to emphasize the ambiguity of Viola and Rosalind's disguises is absent in *Merchant's* trial scene (58). With the single exception of her reprimand to Bassanio when he offers to sacrifice her, Portia is Balthasar for the entire scene. As such she constitutes a more disruptive force to the male realm than Shakespeare's other women. She does not revert to conventionally feminine behavior—she does not faint, like Rosalind, or rely on "Time" to fix her problems, like Viola—because she was not conventionally feminine in the first place. Portia remains a powerful woman throughout the trial scene, just as she resumes her position as wife with her 'masculine' authority fully intact; like *Swetnam's* Lorenzo, she is both 'female' and 'male,' a complete human being. As such Portia successfully overturns patriarchal constructions of gender.

Portia's so-called 'ring trick,' with which the play concludes, can be read in terms of this very duality. Catherine Belsey notes that "the equivocations and doubles entendres of Act 5 celebrate a sexual indeterminacy, which is not in-difference but multiplicity" ("Love in Venice" 205). Bassanio, Belsey explains, faces a seeming riddle when Portia returns the ring he thought he gave to the doctor: he discovers that the doctor is a woman, the doctor is a man, and the doctor is Portia (204). The riddle is solved once Bassanio understands that all three statements are true. The ring, we have seen, represents love and contract both—inseparable features of Portia's marriage. Like the ring Shylock had of his wife as a bachelor, which he "would not have given for a wilderness of monkeys" (3.1.108), Portia's ring symbolizes her affection for and loyalty to Bassanio, but also the strict contractual agreement he must uphold as her husband. (Shylock again demonstrates his superiority to "Christian husbands"—he keeps Leah's ring even after her death, while Bassanio gives Portia's away within hours.) Thus she is both woman and man, wife and judge. "Were you the doctor," marvels Bassanio, "and I knew you not?" (5.1.280).

Portia's character celebrates flexible identities within marriage. She embodies the idea of a woman who may marry without losing her property, who may love without losing herself. I cannot, therefore, read her marriage at the end of the play as the simple, predictable containment of subversive behavior that characterizes the end of Shakespearean comedy. *Merchant's* ending rather suggests the new possibilities of marriage in a cultural moment when "the meaning of marriage is unstable, contested, and open to radical reconstruction" (Belsey 205). Portia affirms that even in marriage she

will retain her authority and identity. She speaks of both the 'doctor' and herself when she informs her husband, "Know him I shall, I am well sure of it" (5.1.227-29).

NOTES

¹ Cohen's reading of Shylock suggests that *Merchant* rewrites religious prejudices in the socio-economic sphere: Shylock's alienation is due less to his failure to accept Christ than to his usury. Shylock's lack of submissiveness toward his aristocratic adversaries suggests "the weakening of the sociopolitical hegemony that preserved royalist-aristocratic privilege" (43). On usury, see also Walter Cohen, "*The Merchant of Venice* and the Possibilities of Historical Criticism."

² Shakespeare similarly imposes usury on a Jewish figure, despite the fact that most English usurers at the time were not Jews; Jews were expelled in the thirteenth century, and very few remained in Shakespeare's day. Shakespeare might have made Shylock a Jew because *Merchant* is set in Italy, and many European usurers were Jewish, or perhaps because he wanted to reinforce the idea that usury was a foreign, as well as an unchristian, practice.

³ Sedgwick hypothesizes the "potential unbrokenness of a continuum between homosocial and homosexual" (1) as a strategy for generalizing about the structure of male-male relationships. However, see also Joseph Pequigney, "The Two Antonios and Same-Sex Love in *Twelfth Night* and *The Merchant of Venice*." Pequigney contends that "there is almost nothing to suggest a sexual dimension in the amity of Antonio and Bassanio . . . [Antonio's] love for his friend is philia instead of eros" (187). He also notes that during this period "the word 'lover' as 'friend,' without erotic connotation, was quite common" (185).

⁴ On the 'exchange of women' theory, see Karen Newman, "Portia's Ring: Unruly Women and Structures of Exchange in *The Merchant of Venice*." Newman describes Claude Lévi-Strauss' proposal in *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* that "marriage is the most fundamental form of gift exchange, and women the most basic of gifts. . . . gift-giving . . . establishes social bonds and is a strategy of power" (20). Newman also refers to Gayle Rubin's early essay, "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex," which looks at the "sex/ gender system" as "a part of social life which is the locus of the oppression of women, of sexual minorities, and of certain aspects of human personality within individuals" (Rubin 159).

⁵ The 'triangle' sonnets, those which involve the poet, the young man, and the dark lady, include 40-42, 133-136, and 144.

⁶ Kate Chedgzoy, in *Shakespeare's Queer Children*, suggests a way women might be written back into the *Sonnets*. Reading the early sonnets, which repeatedly urge procreation, Chedgzoy senses a maternal voice in such lines as "So thou, thyself outgoing in thy noon,/ Unlooked on diest unless thou get a son" (7). She configures procreation in the *Sonnets* as a kind of male motherhood.

⁷ Vickers explains that the term 'blazon' derives both from the French *blasoner* and the English "to blaze." "A blazon was, first, a conventional heraldic description of a shield, and, second, a conventional poetic description of an object praised or blamed by a rhetorician-poet" (95). The most famous examples from the French tradition are the *Blasons anatomiques du corps féminin* (1543), in which each poem praised a separate part of the female body. In the English tradition, poetic blazon consisted of a catalogue listing particular female parts—hand, foot, lip, eye, brow—and celebrating the beauty of each.

⁸ Specifically, Parker examines *Cymbeline* in the context of male merchandizing of women; the play "contains within it, as the crucial pivot of its plot, a contest in which the husband or possessor of the 'jewel' of his wife 'blazes' her virtue and beauty so strongly as to incite the envy of another man" (132).

⁹ In *Shakespeare and the Jews*, James Shapiro notes that we do not learn what part Shylock has in mind until the trial scene, when we find out the flesh is to be cut from "nearest the merchant's hear" (4.1.231). Shapiro explains that Shylock has displaced Jewish circumcision onto Antonio's heart, a move which "can be seen as the height of the literalism that informs all his actions in the play Shylock will cut his Christian adversary in that part of the body where the Christians believe themselves to be truly circumcised: the heart" (127).

¹⁰ The number of lines spoken by various characters in this play perhaps bears some relation to its power structures. As the Pelican *Complete Works* helpfully calculates, Portia has *Merchant's* longest role, and, at 565, comes second only to Rosalind in lines spoken by female comic characters.

¹¹ Frances E. Dolan's interesting recent article, "Household Chastisements," discusses the household as a space in which women "could most readily and legitimately exercise authority" (210). Although Dolan is primarily concerned with household authority as it manifests itself in female violence, the concept of general domestic authority certainly recalls Portia, who, even once married, directs everyone inside *her* house with a commanding, "Let us go in" (5.1.297).

¹² See also Chojnacki, "Dowries and Kinsmen in Early Renaissance Venice."

¹³ Stephen A. Cohen suggests that even Portia's mercy speech is not about mercy, but is rather a "reassertion of the fundamental value and necessity of social hierarchy" ("The Quality of Mercy" 45). Her speech responds to the threat Shylock poses to the ruling class; thus she replaces "his vision of inter-class violence with one of royally-regulated harmony" (45). Mercy is "enthronèd in the hears of kings;/ It is an attribute to God himself" (4.1.192-93).

¹⁴ Mary Beth Rose points to Moll in Middleton and Dekker's *Roaring Girl* as a rare example of a cross-dressed female who is not attempting to disguise her identity, as Viola does; Moll "seeks not to conceal her sexual identity, but rather to display it. . . . She simply presents herself in society as a woman wearing men's clothes" (*The Expense of Spirit* 65).

¹⁵ While I agree with Howard's reading, I would point out that Viola never does change back into her "woman's weeds" (5.1.264-65); when Orsino asks her to do so, she provides an excuse for why she cannot, and these are her final lines in the play.

Conclusion



Cary's *Mariam* and Shakespeare's *Merchant* provide comparable accounts of early modern marriage: in essence, we discover that Renaissance wives are less people than property. These dramas also depict a similar female response to the doctrine of wifely subjection, in that both *Mariam* and *Portia* call into question the structure of male-dominated marriage. *Mariam* chooses speech over silence and flagrantly disobeys her husband, while *Portia* shamelessly flaunts both her money and her mind.

Yet female autonomy has very different implications in each play. Among *Merchant*'s final lines are Antonio's relieved words of thanks to *Portia* when she tells him that his ships have come in: "Sweet lady, you have given me life and living!" (5.1.286). Antonio—helpless, silent Antonio—is once again rescued by this all-powerful, yet beneficent woman. Just so does this astonishing female character breathe new life into the stereotypical, constructed image that is Renaissance Woman: *Portia* loves and marries, yet does so with strength and authority, and with a sense of her own merit fully intact. In striking contrast to *Mariam*, who goes to her death for defying male authority, *Portia* is the very essence of life: her subversion spells change, transformation, new possibilities. She has fashioned her own version of marriage, reworking silence and

obedience into voice and authority. Her home will be a space of enlightened thought, created by her own determination. Returning home from her triumph in Venice, she says to Nerissa:

That light we see is burning in my hall;
How far that little candle throws his beams!
So shines a good deed in a naughty world. (5.1.89-91)

Cary's *Mariam* has assisted us, by way of contrast, in reaching this view of Portia, for while Mariam and Portia contend with the same set of patriarchal postulates on marriage, Mariam's subversive reaction to them is largely contained. While Cary's hero is notable for her brave defiance of her tyrannical husband, she fails to extract herself from traditional companionate marriage. Rather, she clings to the Renaissance ideal of feminine self-erasure, much as her author is thought to have done in her own marriage. Cary's play dramatizes Renaissance woman's internal conflict by allowing her female characters a dissenting voice, but then quickly containing it within the safety of conventional marriage. The Chorus states the reason for Mariam's demise: "Had Mariam scorn'd to leave a due unpaid,/ She would to Herod then have paid her love:/ And not have been by sullen passion sway'd" (4.8.659-61). Mariam may reject her husband's commands, but she will pay for this disobedience with her life.

Mariam, as a representation of woman as she was constructed in the period, has served to illuminate Portia's exceptional status among Renaissance female characters. I do not, however, wish to privilege Shakespeare's play over Cary's. *Mariam* makes a substantial contribution to a feminist investigation of Renaissance drama, particularly when we consider Cary's youth, her inexperience, and her confined existence as a woman under patriarchy. Her play is a remarkable achievement in spite of these factors, and also

because of them: as a married female writer, Cary brings us closer to understanding women's experience in this period than Shakespeare ever did.

It seems, then, that studies of women writers and studies of Shakespeare can be brought together with fruitful results. As feminist scholars continue to explore early modern women's writing, as they appear poised to do, the inclusion of the Shakespearean canon will only assist them. Here I have provided a brief example of such a project: Cary's play and Shakespeare's validate one another in important, far-reaching ways. When Mariam meets Portia, the possibilities are endless.

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